

Information and Help

Alcohol and Aging: Know the Facts

If you or someone you know needs help, talk to your doctor, or call **HealthLinkBC** (<http://www.healthlinkbc.ca/>) 24/7 to speak to a registered nurse about your concerns.

8-1-1 (across B.C.)

7-1-1 (deaf/hearing-impaired)

For alcohol and drug information, referral services and counseling information, call the **Alcohol and Drug Information and Referral Service**. Services are confidential, multilingual, free and available 24/7.

1-800-663-1441 (across B.C.)

2-1-1 (Metro Vancouver, Fraser Valley and Squamish-Lillooet)

email: help@bc211.ca

More information about alcohol and aging can be found at www.seniorsBC.ca.

Many Canadians enjoy a drink when socializing, relaxing and celebrating. But did you know that as we get older, we become more sensitive to the effects of alcohol?



Alcohol and the Aging Body

Drinking Guidelines for the Older Adult

Our bodies process alcohol more slowly as we age. Alcohol is absorbed and distributed through the body's total water content. With age we tend to lose lean body mass, resulting in more body fat and less water in the body to dilute the alcohol.

Fact: The same amount of alcohol produces higher blood alcohol content in an older person than it does in a younger adult of the same weight.



Not all seniors are the same. We vary in age, gender, ethnicity, weight, body fat and health status. Therefore the amount that is safe to drink varies as well, but will decrease as we age.

The Centre for Addictions Research of B.C. advises older adults who choose to drink to:

- ▶ drink below limits suggested for adults in general, so
 - ▶ per week = fewer than 10 drinks for women and 15 for men;
 - ▶ on any occasion = fewer than 3 drinks for women and 4 for men;
- ▶ avoid alcohol when taking medication, or check with a doctor or pharmacist first.

1 standard drink =

- ☑ 142 ml/5 oz wine (12% alcohol)
- ☑ 43 ml/1.5 oz liquor (40% alcohol)
- ☑ 1 bottle (341 ml/12 oz) of beer (5% alcohol)



Higher alcohol beers and coolers have more alcohol than one standard drink.

Dealing with Loss

Many older adults have to deal with the loss of a loved one, a job, their health or mobility. Some adults increase their consumption of alcohol due to these life altering changes. Loneliness, boredom, depression, or feelings of inadequacy can all lead to harmful drinking.

Have you noticed physical or mental health changes in an older friend?

If he/she seems depressed, resists help, is argumentative, suffers from memory loss, is often confused or drowsy, has unexplained falls and shows signs of bruising, you may have reason to be concerned. Your friend/family member could be drinking too much alcohol.

Problem drinking is often not noticed because many older adults prefer to drink alone in the privacy of their homes.

Fact: Alcohol-related problems in older adults can be mistaken for physical, social or emotional conditions associated with aging such as depression, insomnia, poor nutrition, or frequent falls.

Alcohol and Health

Too much alcohol can make some health problems worse. These include: high blood pressure, memory loss, mood disorders such as depression or anxiety, high blood sugar (diabetes), digestive problems, loss of appetite, weak bones (osteoporosis), decreased mobility and stroke.

Regular heavy use, as well as occasional excessive use, can be harmful.

Drinking alcohol can contribute to chronic diseases, including cancer and some heart conditions. Women need to be especially careful because they are more at risk of developing alcohol-related liver damage and other health problems.

Even cutting back a little can reduce your risk of many illnesses and health effects, so you can continue to enjoy a healthy, independent life.



Alcohol and Medication can be a Dangerous Mix

Almost half of all prescription drugs taken by older people can interact with alcohol. Even small amounts of alcohol can interfere, or interact harmfully with over-the-counter or prescribed medications. Alcohol can reduce or neutralize the effects of some medications. As well, some drugs can intensify the sedative effects of alcohol, such as increased drowsiness and reduced motor coordination.

If you are on medication and like to drink occasionally, talk to your doctor or a pharmacist about potential drug and alcohol interactions.



Alcohol and Mobility

Drinking alcohol can affect balance and mobility and result in injuries and falls.

Age-related physical changes can make getting around more challenging. Drinking alcohol will increase the risk of losing balance and falling.

Drinking alcohol increases the risk of motor vehicle crashes.

Driving demands excellent vision and fast reaction times. Alcohol decreases brain activity and affects alertness, judgment, coordination, memory and reaction times. Older adults will be more impaired from even moderate doses than younger people, yet less aware of this when it happens.

