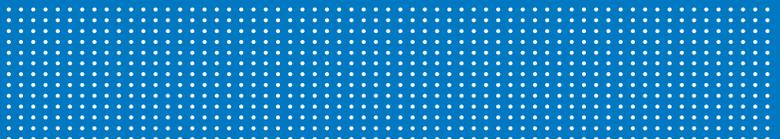


CARE TALK CHANGE

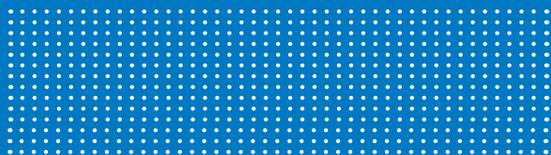
LEARN ALCOHOL BASICS

Information for **OLDER ADULTS**



Virginia Department of
Alcoholic Beverage Control
Education and Prevention
Publication Series

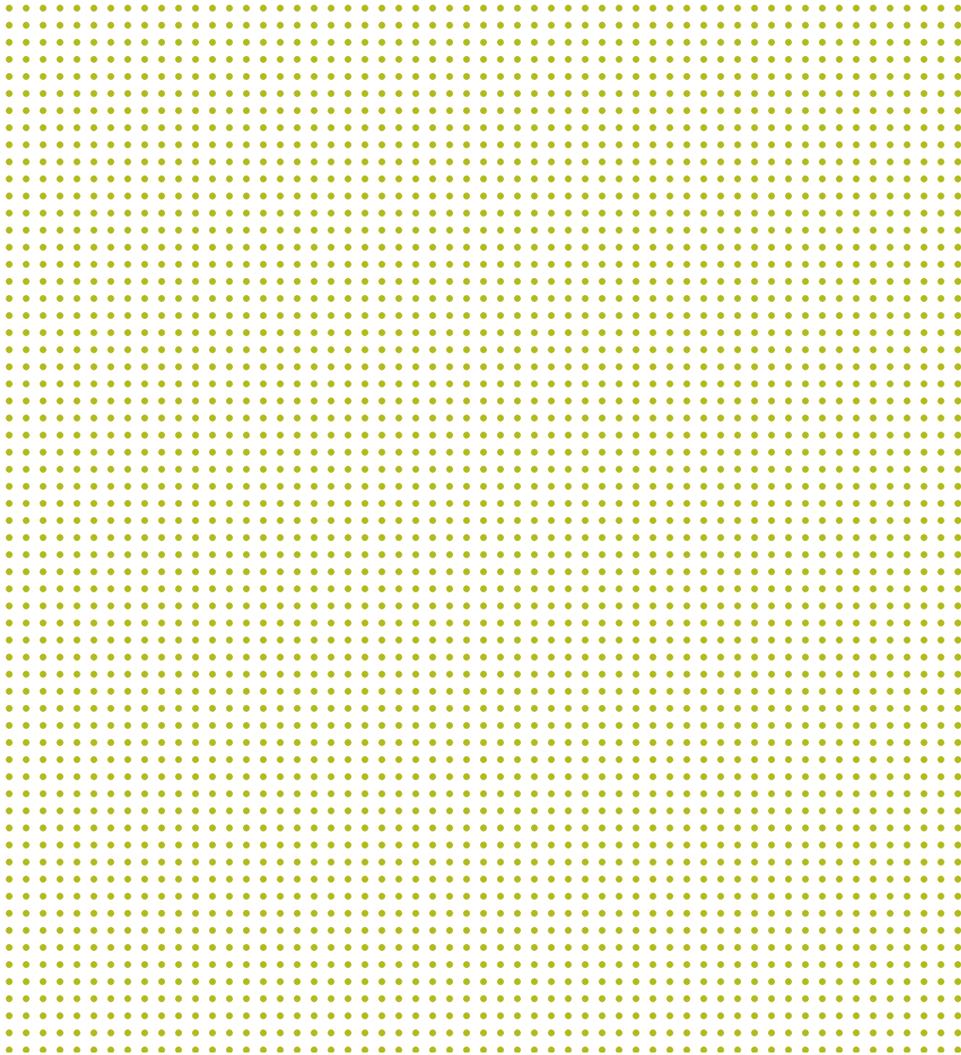
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INTRODUCTION

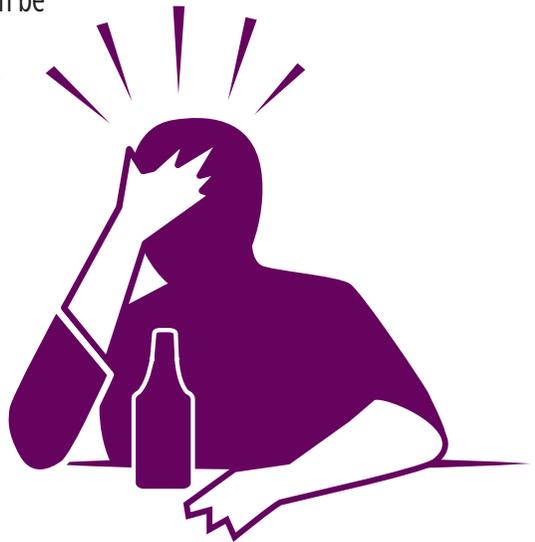
Many enriching experiences await you in the second half of life—such as mentoring young people and enjoying greater freedom to travel, volunteer and explore new hobbies. To enhance your health and safety during this time of your life, it's very important to understand that physical changes, medicine interactions and other factors may cause dangerous interactions and outcomes from alcohol use. As you age, it is important to consider how your choices can positively and negatively affect the quality of your life.



“AGING IS NOT LOST YOUTH BUT
A NEW STAGE OF OPPORTUNITY
AND STRENGTH.” **BETTY FRIEDAN**

Alcohol Misuse in Later Life— A Growing Problem

Alcohol misuse is a growing problem among older adults. Age-related and life-changing events such as retirement, health issues, additional caregiving responsibilities and mourning the loss of loved ones can make you more susceptible to increased alcohol consumption. Sometimes these issues can be overlooked because some of the signs and symptoms of alcohol misuse in older adults mirror those of aging, depression and dementia.



What Are Some Signs of Alcohol Misuse in Older Adults?

Some of the signs and symptoms of alcohol misuse in older adults include:



Frequent and unexplained injuries



Neglect of personal hygiene



Mood swings



Depression or anxiety



Change in sleep patterns and eating habits



Slurred speech



Unsteady gait



The smell of alcohol on breath

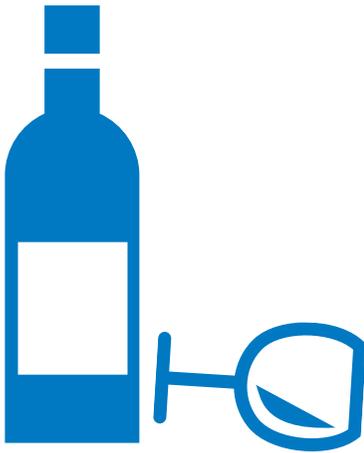


Confusion or forgetfulness



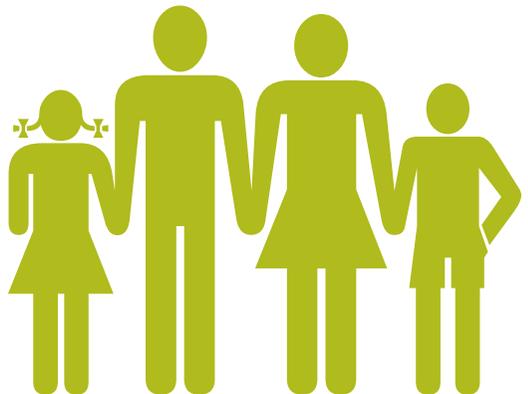
Isolation from family and friends

Sometimes even trained medical providers can fail to diagnose an alcohol problem. Alcohol misuse late in life is a "hidden epidemic." Not only is it hidden from medical providers, but alcohol misuse often occurs in private, away from family, friends and neighbors.



Some drinking habits remain hidden because older adults may be embarrassed and don't know how to ask for help. They may not want to be labeled or feel like they are causing a burden.

Friends and family members may be in denial about a drinking problem or are uncomfortable discussing this issue. It's important to discuss potential problems and show support and concern without being judgmental. It's healthy to talk about responsible alcohol consumption across the lifespan. By raising the topic you can help "normalize" conversations about alcohol.



Physical Changes Make Alcohol More Risky

Because of physical changes that occur with aging, you will generally experience the effects of alcohol more quickly, and more dramatically, than when you were younger. As we get older, we metabolize, or break down, alcohol slower than we did when we were younger. This causes alcohol to stay in our bodies longer.

Some of the physical changes that make alcohol riskier:

- The amount of water in the body decreases
 - The proportion of body fat to lean muscle increases
 - The liver becomes less efficient processing alcohol
-

As a result, you have a higher percentage of alcohol in your blood than younger people after drinking the same amount of alcohol! This increases your risk for falls, car crashes and additional medical problems.

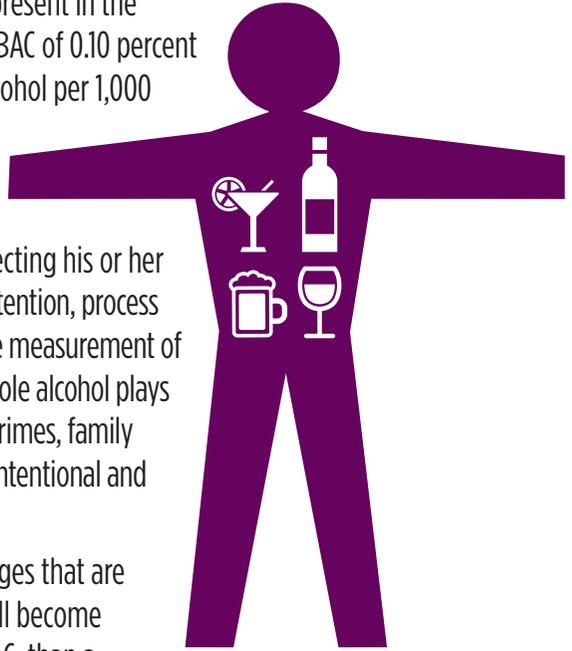


Most importantly, you can develop problems with alcohol even if your drinking habits have not changed.

What is Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC)?

BAC is the amount of alcohol that is present in the bloodstream. For example, having a BAC of 0.10 percent means that a person has one part alcohol per 1,000 parts blood present in the body. At certain BAC levels, alcohol has been shown to alter a person's visual functions and perceptions, affecting his or her ability to react, concentrate or pay attention, process information and operate a vehicle. The measurement of BAC is important for determining the role alcohol plays in car crashes, physical injuries, fires, crimes, family violence, suicides and other forms of intentional and unintentional injury.

Remember: Due to the physical changes that are normal with aging, an older adult will become more impaired, and have a higher BAC, than a younger person who consumed the same amount of alcohol. Women tend to reach a higher BAC faster because they are typically smaller and have less muscle to absorb the alcohol than men.



BAC estimators are normally not as accurate for older adults as they are usually designed for younger people.

“THE LONGER I LIVE THE MORE BEAUTIFUL LIFE BECOMES.”

FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT

How Can I Minimize My Risk?

The National Institutes of Health recommends that adults older than 65, who are healthy and do not take medications, follow these limits:



- No more than seven standard drinks per week
- For **men**, no more than three drinks in a day
- For **women**, recommendations are slightly lower



Drinking more than these amounts puts you at risk of serious alcohol problems. **CAUTION: If you have a health problem or take certain medications, you may need to drink less or not at all!**

Drinking alcohol can make these common health problems worse:

- Diabetes
- High blood pressure
- Congestive heart failure
- Stroke
- Liver problems
- Osteoporosis
- Memory problems
- Mood disorders

Alcohol and Medications Can Be A Dangerous Combination!

If you're taking medications, it is important to be aware of possible interactions with, and reactions to, alcohol. Many medicines—prescription, over-the-counter, or herbal remedies—can be dangerous or even fatal when mixed with alcohol. Before taking any medicine, talk to your doctor or pharmacist about whether it is safe to drink alcohol with your medications.



Some of the medications that can have dangerous interactions with alcohol include:

ASPIRIN • ACETAMINOPHEN • COLD AND ALLERGY MEDICATION • COUGH SYRUP
SLEEPING AIDS • PAIN MEDICATION • ANXIETY OR DEPRESSION MEDICATION

Do You Know How Much You Are Drinking?



It's important to understand what constitutes a "standard drink." Not all drinks are created equal! For example, a Long Island Iced Tea includes multiple shots of alcohol that could equal up to three drinks.

A Standard Drink Is:



ONE SHOT
1.5 OZ. OF
80 PROOF LIQUOR
40% ALCOHOL



5 OZ. GLASS OF WINE
APPROXIMATELY
12% ALCOHOL



12 OZ. BEER
APPROXIMATELY
7% ALCOHOL

Be aware of the ingredients in a mixed drink, the size of the drink and the amount of alcohol—keeping in mind that some wines and beers contain a higher percentage of alcohol than others.



Drinking and Driving Don't Mix!

Drunk driving occurs when a person who is intoxicated gets behind the wheel of a vehicle. You do not have to be drunk to be considered impaired or under the influence of alcohol. Impairment can begin with the first drink. Driving skills and abilities, such as judgment, reaction time and motor coordination are impaired in most people long before they exhibit visible signs of drunkenness.

The Commonwealth of Virginia defines the legal limit for driving while intoxicated at a BAC of .08 for those 21 years of age and older. Violators are guilty of a Class 1 misdemeanor and, upon conviction, face a fine of up to \$2,500, a year in jail, and/or 50 hours of community service. Violators may also lose their driver's license for up to one year.

As early as age 60, but more frequently after the age of 75, driving skills tend to decline. This decline is especially true of older adult drivers who take certain medications or have conditions associated with the aging process such as vision problems, arthritis, diabetes, strokes, Parkinson's disease or Alzheimer's disease.

Be safe and never drink and drive!

Be a Good Role Model For Younger Generations

Your children, grandchildren and community members may look to you as a role model and be influenced by your behavior. Make responsible, healthy choices related to alcohol!

- Never purchase alcohol for someone younger than 21. This is called social providing; it is illegal and dangerous.
- When you host parties, don't make alcohol the focus. Put yourself in the mind of a non-drinker. Don't force drinks on your guests or rush to refill their glasses right away. Some guests may accept drinks they don't want in order to avoid appearing rude.
- Don't let people drink and drive. Car pooling and cabs can save lives. It's the responsibility of everyone (especially the host of the party) to stop drinkers from driving. If necessary, take away the car keys and invite guests to spend the night.
- Use only **non-drinking** designated drivers.
- Engage in healthy activities that don't include drinking alcohol. Don't rely on alcohol to make a social situation more comfortable or fun.

Always Lock Up Alcohol and Medications

Even if you live alone, it's important to lock up your alcohol and medications. This will help protect you from theft and will prevent these substances from being accessed by anyone other than you. Nearly half of those between the ages of 12 and 14 who drink get their alcohol from family or at home. Locking up alcohol and medications protects you and others!



What Are the Signs of Alcohol Poisoning?

Know the signs of alcohol poisoning and be prepared to call 911 if anyone has the following symptoms:



Am I At Risk of an Alcohol Use Disorder



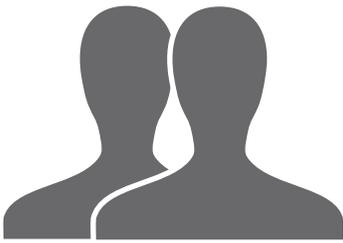
An alcohol use disorder (AUD), or alcoholism, is when drinking starts to become a problem to the individual and those around them. It is important to recognize if you display any symptoms of AUD and to immediately seek help.

To assess whether you or a loved one may have an AUD, here are some questions to ask.

- Have you ever tried to cut down on your drinking?
- Do you get annoyed when people talk about your drinking?
- Do you ever feel guilty about your drinking?
- Do you ever have an "eye-opener" in the morning?
- Have you ever increased your drinking after experiencing a loss in your life?
- After a few drinks, have you sometimes not eaten or skipped a meal because you didn't feel hungry?
- Does alcohol sometimes make it hard for you to remember parts of the day or night?
- Has a doctor or nurse ever said they were worried or concerned about your drinking?
- Have you had times when you ended up drinking more, or longer than you intended?
- Have you experienced craving — a strong need, or urge, to drink?
- Continued to drink even though it was causing trouble with your family or friends?

- Given up or cut back on activities that were important or interesting to you, or gave you pleasure, in order to drink?
- Continued to drink even though it was making you feel depressed or anxious or adding to another health problem? Or after having had a memory blackout?
- Found that when the effects of alcohol were wearing off, you had withdrawal symptoms, such as trouble sleeping, shakiness, irritability, anxiety, depression, restlessness, nausea, or sweating? Or sensed things that were not there?

If you answered yes to one or more of these questions, consult your doctor or health care provider.



Help is Available

If you believe you have a problem with alcohol, or if you are a friend, family member or caregiver of an older adult who may need help with alcohol or substance misuse, contact a primary care physician or a geriatrician who specializes in addictions. Older adults who seek help and undergo treatment for an alcohol problem experience great success. It is never too late to make a positive change!

You may also seek assistance at one or more of the following:

- **Alcoholics Anonymous**
- **Alcoholism counselors, social workers, psychologists and clergy**
- **Alcoholism treatment centers**
- **An area agency on aging**
- **Senior Navigator at www.seniornavigator.org**

Tips for Being A Responsible Drinker



Understand alcohol limit recommendations for older adults.



Talk to your doctor or pharmacist about drinking alcohol while you are on any medications.



Know what a standard drink size is so that you can accurately count your drinks.



Don't drink on an empty stomach. Eat foods high in protein before, during and after you drink.



Engage in healthy activities that don't include drinking alcohol. Don't rely on alcohol to make a social situation more comfortable or fun or to deal with a sudden loss. Focus on having as much fun without drinking as you do when you are!



Be aware of urges to drink. Don't use having a good or bad day as an excuse for drinking excessively.



Know how to say "no" when you are offered a drink but don't want one.



Be responsible for yourself and those around you. Lock up your alcohol and don't provide it to your family members younger than 21.



Never drink and drive!

“GROW OLD ALONG WITH ME! THE BEST IS YET TO BE.” **ROBERT BROWNING**

RESOURCES

National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (www.niaaa.nih.gov)

NIAAA supports and conducts research on the impact of alcohol use on human health and well-being. It is the largest funder of alcohol research in the world.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (www.samhsa.gov)

SAMHSA's mission is to reduce the impact of substance abuse and mental illness on America's communities.

Virginia GrandDriver (www.granddriver.net)

The Virginia GrandDriver website provides information about the effects of aging on safe driving, safety tips, warning signs and resources.

Virginia Highway Safety Office (www.dmv.state.va.us/safety)

The Virginia Highway Safety Office strives to foster safe behaviors on the Commonwealth's roadways through effective, innovative initiatives. Numerous topics are highlighted including impaired driving and safety for mature drivers.

Virginia ABC Education and Prevention Resources

Alcohol and Aging Awareness Group (AAAG)

A statewide affiliate group that provides education, training and resources to prevent the misuse of alcohol and medications as adults age.

Miss Virginia School Tour

In partnership with Virginia ABC, Miss Virginia travels across Virginia to elementary schools spreading a message of health, wellness and prevention with students and teachers.

Being Outstanding Leaders Together (BOLT) Against Drugs and Alcohol

Provides drug and alcohol prevention knowledge to middle school students through regional community collaboration and high school peer leadership.

Project Sticker Shock

Supplies are provided to community groups in an effort to decrease social providing. The project includes stickers being placed on alcohol packaging reminding buyers to not provide to minors and is done in conjunction with a press event to help raise awareness.

Youth Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention Project (YADAPP)

A high school youth-led leadership conference equipping teens with a strategic plan and empowering them to keep their schools and communities alcohol and drug free.

College Tour

A multi-stop conference that focuses on promoting zero tolerance for underage drinking, social responsibility, collaboration and leadership on college and university campuses across Virginia.

Responsible Sellers & Servers: Virginia's Program (RSVP) Managers' Alcohol Responsibility Training (MART)

Trainings are held regionally and conducted by Virginia ABC special agents to help businesses that sell alcohol become more responsible and to better understand Virginia laws, rules and regulations.

Virginia Office for Substance Abuse Prevention (VOSAP)

An organization that promotes collaboration among state and local agencies, organizations, coalitions and faith communities that address substance abuse prevention.

Educational Materials

Publications, online training, and public service announcements are available to the general public at no cost.

Grant Program

Alcohol education and prevention grants assist community partners to develop and enhance initiatives related to alcohol education and prevention. Grant cycle is July through June with applications due in the spring.



*VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF
ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGE CONTROL*

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