



ALCOHOL AND HEALTH

# Alcohol as we Age





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## **Introduction**

People are living longer and are generally healthier. This means that seniors are making up a larger portion of our population.

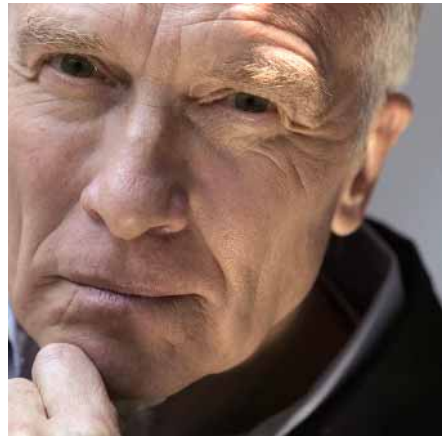
Although alcohol use typically declines with age, some seniors may be at risk for alcohol-related problems.

This pamphlet will help you understand what issues seniors need to be aware of and help you identify whether you or someone you know might be at risk.

## What makes alcohol an issue for seniors?

Alcohol has a greater effect on seniors because our **metabolism changes as we age**. Older people are more sensitive to the effects of alcohol, and a little will go a long way.

Seniors generally take **more medications** than other adults. Mixing alcohol with either **prescription or over-the-counter drugs is unwise** and can be dangerous.



The development of age-related health problems can cause anxiety, and drinking may help some people feel more relaxed. At the same time, chronic conditions such as heart disease or decreased mobility can be **aggravated by alcohol use**.

Retirement from paid work results in many changes. Your identity and social life may shift, and for many the transition is smooth. However, it can bring long stretches of leisure time and may result in **isolation and**

**depression.** Unfortunately, alcohol may assume a role in helping pass the time.

Alcohol problems among older persons are often mistaken for physical, social or emotional conditions associated with aging. **The abuse or misuse of alcohol may go undetected or may be treated inappropriately.**

For some seniors, lack of day-to-day contact with fellow workers, families, and neighbours can make it difficult for others to detect an alcohol problem if one exists.



Older people who have lived through many life experiences often pride themselves on being able to handle their problems without the help of outsiders. They may be unwilling to admit to a drinking problem or uncomfortable seeking help.

Alcohol problems among older people can look quite different. Some seniors have drunk regularly throughout most of their lives.



Others drink infrequently and might inadvertently mix alcohol with other drugs in ways that are harmful.



## **What are some of the warning signs that could be related to alcohol problems?**

- Drinking quickly, secretly, or more often
- Starting your day with a drink, or using alcohol to manage pain
- Drinking to cope with loneliness or loss
- Unexplained changes in health, like sleeping problems, loss of appetite, mood swings
- Medication not working properly
- Not taking care of yourself or your home
- Conflict and withdrawal from family and friends



## **So what can I do if I think I might be at risk?**

You can choose healthier options: exercise, a second career, hobbies. Talk to a friend, family member or counsellor.

Throughout our lives, it is important to enjoy the best health possible.

## **What are some of the other things I can do to stay healthy?**

- Be active – enjoy the outdoors
- Go for a walk, keep a garden, golf, or swim
- Learn some stretching exercises you can do at home
- Join an exercise or dance class
- Walk with a friend
- Drink lots of water (up to eight glasses a day)
- Eat more whole grain products, vegetables, and fruits, and less fat, sugars, fast food and meats
- Instead of coffee, tea and cola, try herbal teas, hot water with lemon, or milk
- Focus on your accomplishments and the good things in your life and share these with others



## What can I do to help me cope with loneliness?

- Make the effort to meet new people of all ages, and don't forget old friends and neighbours
- Join a seniors' organization like Sign Post Seniors, Elder Active Association, or the Golden Age Society
- Volunteer! The rewards are enormous and you'll make new friends and find new interests.
- Stay connected with friends and family (ask someone to help you get the best long distance "telephone deal")
- Take up a hobby such as gardening, model trains, arts and crafts, needlepoint, playing a musical instrument, reading, writing, or doing puzzles
- Learn to e-mail
- Adopt a pet





**Getting to know your doctor and pharmacist is also a good idea. These health professionals will have suggestions about alcohol use and medication interactions.**

Young or old, it is important to ask for help when needed.

**For more information and confidential support, you can call:**

**Alcohol and Drug Services:**

(867)667-5777, or  
toll free 1-800-661-0408, ext. 5777

**Senior Services:**

(867)667-3946 or  
toll free 1-800-661-0408, ext. 3946.



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