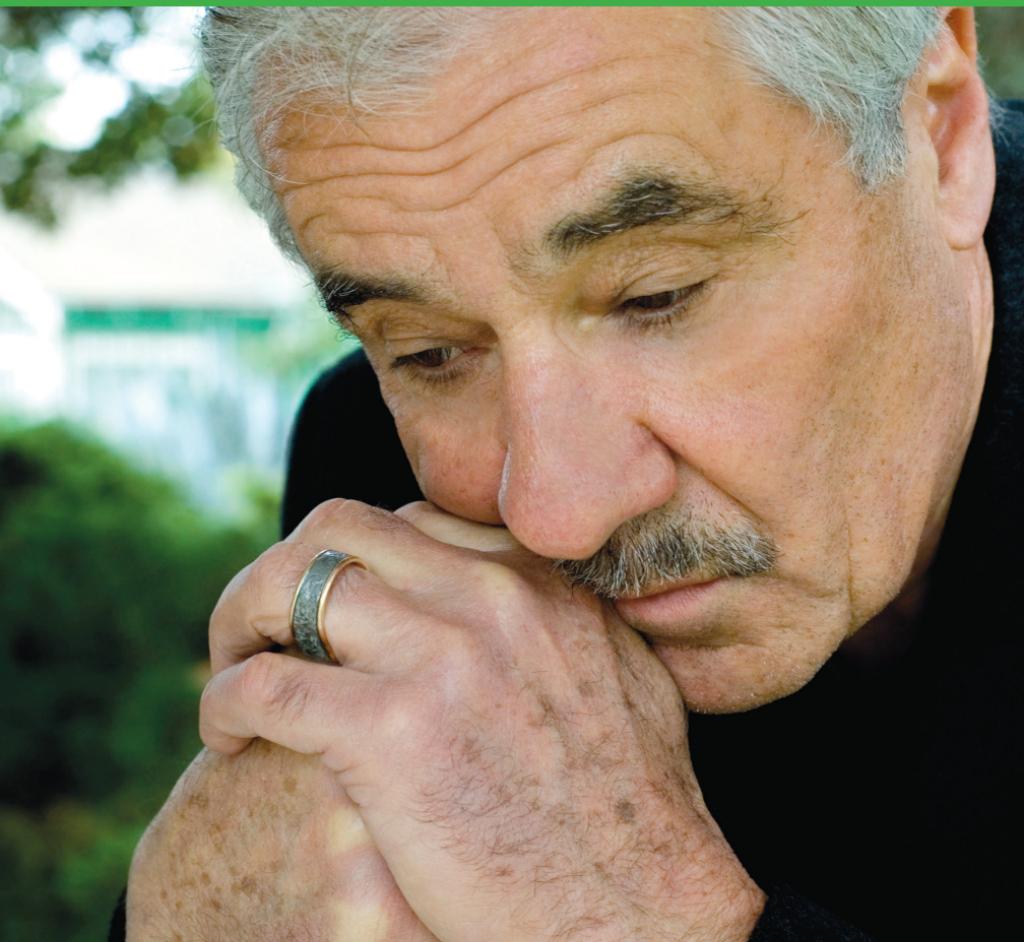


Feel older and wiser about most things?

What about alcohol and other drugs?

Simple questions. Straight answers about
the risks of alcohol and drugs for older adults.

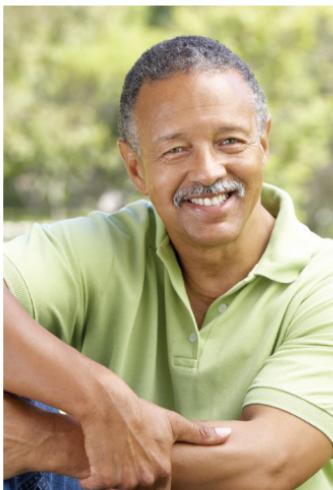


Why am I being asked about alcohol and other drugs?

These questions are part of good health care, just like asking about tobacco use, diet, and exercise. It's important to be honest about how much you drink and which drugs you use. That way your health care provider can help you learn about your risk factors and can offer you the best care.

When it comes to alcohol and other drugs, why are older people different?

As you age, your body can't process alcohol or drugs the way it did when you were younger. You may feel stronger effects sooner, and for a longer time. Balance can become a problem and may lead to falls. Other age-related changes may also make you more sensitive to alcohol and drugs. Alcohol or other drugs may make your medications too strong or too weak. For better health and safety, it may help to know about the different ways alcohol and drugs can affect you now.



What is moderate drinking for adults 65 or older?

- Men 65 or older: The way your body now processes alcohol means that effects may be more intense and last longer.
- Women 65 or older: Women's bodies react more strongly to alcohol than men's.
- A standard drink is 12 ounces of beer, 5 ounces of wine, or 1.5 ounces of liquor.

Talk to your health care provider about whether you can safely drink alcohol, and how much.

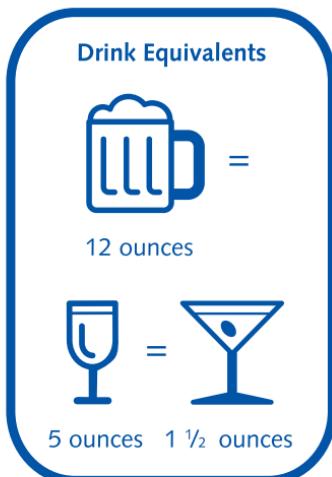
The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) recommends that both men and women age 65 and over consume no more than one standard drink/day and no more than seven standard drinks/week.

Keep in mind: Drinking above the limits your doctor recommends is unhealthy.

What is a standard drink?

- 1 can (12 oz.) of beer or ale
- 1 glass (5 oz.) of wine
- 1 single shot (1 1/2 oz.) of hard liquor (vodka, tequila, whiskey, scotch, rum)
- 1 small glass (4 oz.) sherry or liqueur

These are the standard measures, but you may be served a different amount.



Who should not use alcohol at all?

Those who:

- Have certain health conditions, like hepatitis C.*
- Take medications that interact with alcohol, like muscle relaxants or some pain medicines.*
- Plan to drive or use heavy machinery, like lawnmowers.
- Have a history of problems with alcohol and/or drugs.

*Ask your doctor/pharmacist if it is safe for you to use alcohol.

Is it true that alcohol levels stay higher for a longer time in a person 65 or older?

Yes. Older adults often have less muscle mass and less total body water, so alcohol levels go up faster and stay high longer than in a younger person.

What about marijuana?

We're still learning about how marijuana affects older adults. We do know that it, too, can affect older adults more quickly and for a longer time. We also know that smoking marijuana regularly is associated with airway inflammation and chronic bronchitis.



We don't know yet how marijuana in food (edible) may affect your digestive system. We do know that when used with food it takes longer to feel the effects. Sometimes people use too much and that can cause serious health problems.

It's safest to store marijuana — especially edibles — safely away from grandchildren and pets.

What facts about alcohol, marijuana, and other drugs should I keep in mind now that I'm older?

They can:

- Interact with some prescriptions and over-the-counter medicines.
- Make high blood pressure and diabetes harder to control.
- Lead to strokes, memory problems, and dementia. Alcohol use can also lead to liver disease.
- Affect your balance and that may cause falls.
- Cause sleep problems or make sleep problems worse.

Is it ever safe to use someone else's prescription medications?

No. Prescription medicines are legal and treat health problems. But using medicine that was prescribed for someone else for any reason could harm your health and may lead to drug misuse problems or overdose.

Also it is never safe to share your medicines with anyone else.

What's the best way to stay safe with my medicines?

Know what medicines you take.

- Always take them as directed. Don't split or take extra doses.
- Don't share your medicine with others.
- Ask your doctor or pharmacist what to do if you miss a dose. This could be different for different medicines.
- Ask your doctor to review your prescriptions at each visit.
- Make sure you still need all the medicines you are currently taking.
- Read the instructions that come with your medicines carefully or ask your pharmacist to go over them with you.
- Ask if you should take medicine with food and whether it's safe to drink alcohol or use marijuana while you are taking it.
- Be sure all your doctors know about all the prescriptions, over-the-counter medicines, marijuana or other drugs, herbs, or supplements you're taking and how many drinks you have on a drinking day.
- Keep medications with addiction potential (such as opioids) in a locked medication box.

How can I prevent problems with alcohol?

Always tell your doctors and other health care providers if you drink alcohol, even if it's only once in a while. Ask your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist how alcohol will interact with your medicines. If it is OK for you to have alcohol, it may be a good idea to eat something before, and while you are having a drink. Remember to drink slowly. If alcohol will interact with your medicine, have a non-alcoholic drink like soda or sparkling water instead.

Is it safe to use alcohol, marijuana or other drugs if I take sleeping pills, pain pills, or pills to calm my nerves?

Always check all the warning labels on all your medicines. It's important to talk to your doctor or pharmacist. He or she can tell you what's best to keep you safe and healthy.

Can over-the-counter medicines cause problems with prescription medicines?

Sometimes. They may make the medicine your doctor prescribes too strong or too weak. Or they may cause a reaction that makes you sick.

Over-the-counter medicines include anything you buy without a prescription, like aspirin, cold and allergy medicine, herbs or vitamins. Ask your doctor or pharmacist what's safe for you.



Is it ever safe to use drugs like cocaine, meth, or other 'club drugs'?

Drugs like these are never safe to use no matter what your age. What's in them can change from use to use. This makes it very hard to know exactly what you are using and how your body might react to it. It is very dangerous to mix drugs like these with alcohol, marijuana, or prescription medicines. You may also find yourself dealing with the police and the court system.



How can I keep track of my prescription drugs so I don't make mistakes?

Make a list of all the medicines you take, what times you take them, and why you are taking them. You can use weekly or day-by-day pill boxes that you can get at the pharmacy. There are also apps available to help you keep track of your medications and when to take them. That makes it easier to keep your pills straight.

If you take pain or anxiety medications it's safest to keep them in a lock box.

What should I watch out for that might signal a medicine, alcohol, marijuana or other drug problem?

Slowing down, having less energy, and sleeping less may be a natural part of getting older. But sometimes these changes can signal a problem caused by prescription medicine, marijuana, alcohol, other drugs, or a combination of any of these. If you suffer confusion, poor memory, falls, sleep problems, or depression, it's smart to tell your doctor.

If you start to use more than usual or mostly for the feeling you get, you may be developing a more serious problem. Try to cut back. If you can't, you may want to get help.



Where can I turn for help?

Help is all around you. You can speak with a family member, doctor, nurse, senior center staff, or clergy member. Check out community, state, and national resources.

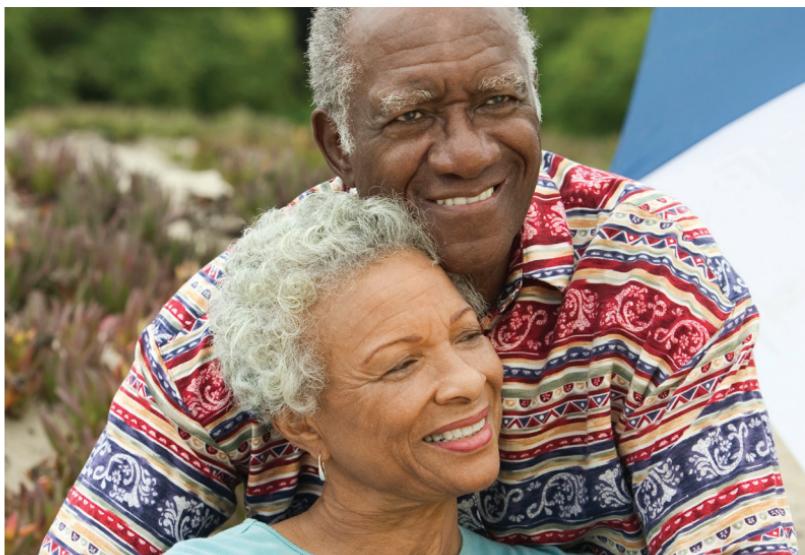
Massachusetts Substance Use Helpline:

Telephone: 1-800-327-5050

TTY: Use MassRelay at 711 or 1-800-439-2370

HelplineMA.org

Provides free and confidential information and referrals for alcohol and other drug misuse problems, related concerns, and opioid overdose prevention.



Prevent an Opioid Overdose

- Naloxone (Narcan) is available at many pharmacies. Ask your pharmacist.
- *Know the Signs of Overdose — Save a Life* is available to learn signs of overdose, rescue breathing directions, and more guidance. (mass.gov/MAClearinghouse)

Massachusetts Smokers' Helpline

1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669)

AA Meetings

www.aa.org/pages/en_US/find-aa-resources

NA Meetings

www.na.org/meetingsearch

You can find more information about alcohol and drugs from these resources:

Massachusetts Bureau of Substance Addiction Services
mass.gov/dph/bsas

Massachusetts Health Promotion Clearinghouse
mass.gov/MAClearinghouse

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
Alcohol and Public Health — www.cdc.gov/alcohol
Injury Prevention and Control — www.cdc.gov/injury

National Institute on Drug Addiction (NIDA)
www.nida.nih.gov

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

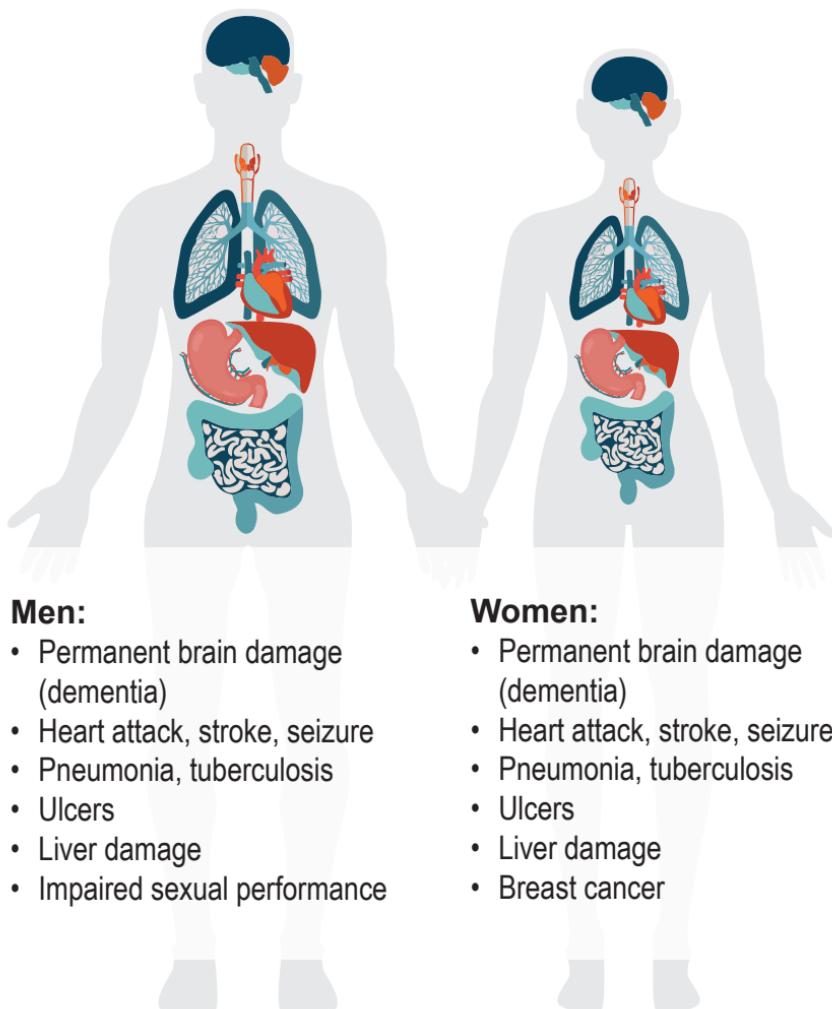
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)
www.samhsa.gov

What if someone I know has a problem with alcohol or drugs?

Talk to that person. Show your concern and encourage the person to get help. That person may need to have medicine dosages checked, or may need to cut back or stop using alcohol or drugs. Suggest getting a check-up and speaking with the doctor. Explain that help is available for alcohol and other drug problems. By sharing the information in this brochure, you may help this person become healthier and happier.



Effects of unhealthy, long-term use of alcohol and other drugs



Men:

- Permanent brain damage (dementia)
- Heart attack, stroke, seizure
- Pneumonia, tuberculosis
- Ulcers
- Liver damage
- Impaired sexual performance

Women:

- Permanent brain damage (dementia)
- Heart attack, stroke, seizure
- Pneumonia, tuberculosis
- Ulcers
- Liver damage
- Breast cancer

Other risks for men and women

- Risk of making some medications less effective or cause a reaction
- Alcohol or drug addiction
- Risk of getting HIV/AIDS, hepatitis B or C
- Overdose and death

Women need to be especially careful because their bodies can be affected faster than men's. Medical studies show that women who had 1 or 2 drinks a day increased their risk of breast cancer. Women are also more likely than men to die early from the unhealthy effects of drugs and alcohol.

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