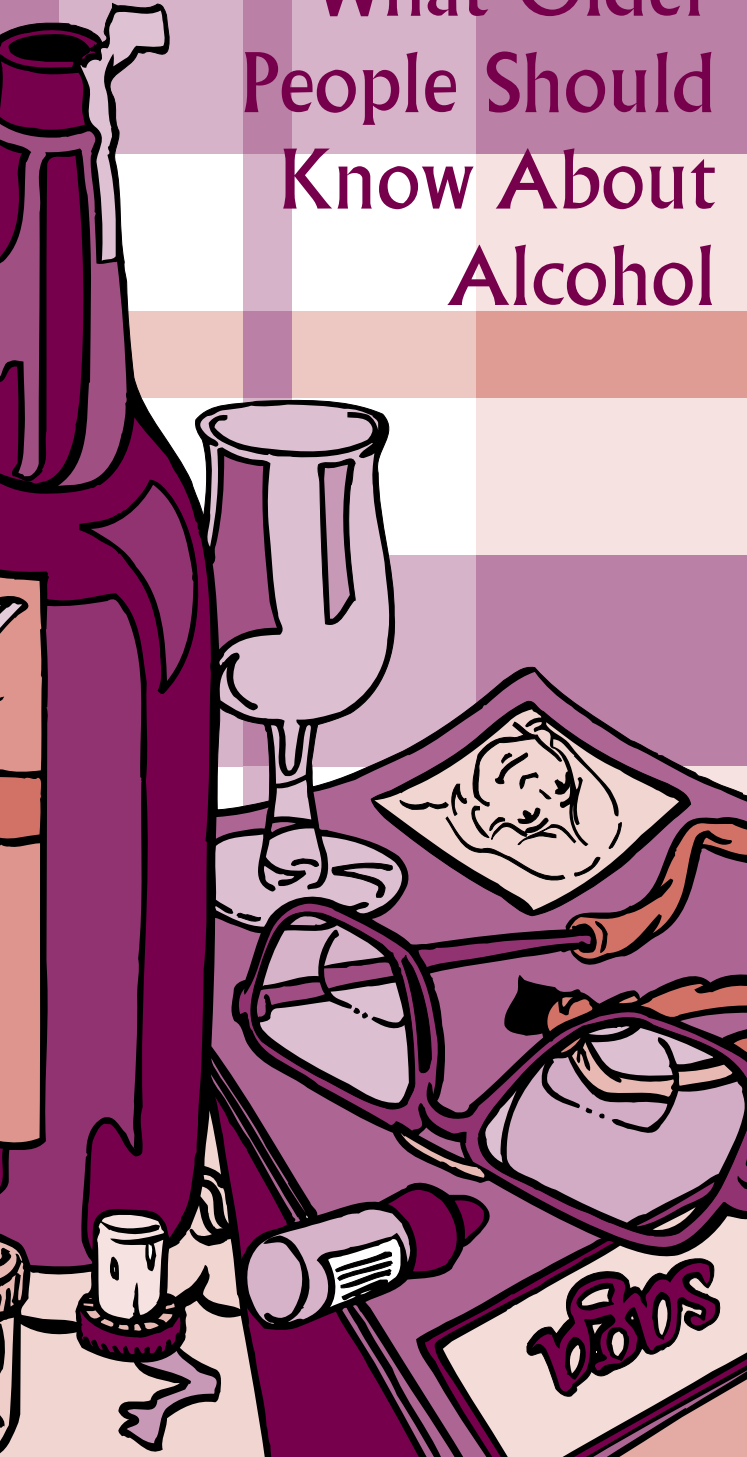


What Older People Should Know About Alcohol



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Generally speaking, older people drink alcohol for the same reasons as younger people - to celebrate special occasions, to relax and to enhance their enjoyment of social gatherings. Most older people have a life-time of experience of safe and sensible drinking behind them and may feel they know all there is to know about alcohol.

However, alcohol may hold special dangers for older people. Bodies work less efficiently in later life and experience of safe drinking levels in younger days may prove an unreliable guide as time goes by and circumstances change.

For this reason older people may want to bear these extra points in mind when making decisions about their drinking patterns.

- Older people's livers and kidneys tend to be slower at expelling alcohol from the bloodstream. This means that the effects of alcohol on the brain and the liver particularly are longer lasting.
- Alcohol can aggravate various other health problems, eg high blood pressure, digestive disorders, poor circulation - from which older people are more likely to suffer.
- Alcohol can interfere with a person's ability to remember things and may contribute to confusion and short-term memory loss.

- Physical co-ordination is affected by alcohol. For people who are already frail or unsteady, there may be an increased likelihood of falls and accidents if they drink alcohol.
- Alcohol can increase the likelihood of incontinence in older people.
- Alcohol is a depressant drug, not a stimulant. Too much of it slows reactions and can make people feel depressed.
- Alcohol is a mind-altering drug - people can change mood, become aggressive or morose, for example.
- There is very little food value in alcoholic drinks and people who drink instead of eating may suffer from malnutrition, it is important to buy enough nourishing food!
- Alcohol is expensive and may lead to an increase in financial problems, especially for people who are already on low incomes.
- Alcohol does not warm the body, it cools it down. People who feel cold should not drink it and no-one suffering from hypothermia should ever be given it.
- Prescribed drugs such as sedatives, tranquillisers and sleeping pills should not be mixed with alcohol. Over-the-counter painkillers and cold remedies may be dangerous too. Ask your doctor or pharmacist if it is safe to drink alcohol with any medicine you are taking.

Sadly, some elderly people suffer bereavement, lose confidence and become isolated and lonely. Others may suffer from chronic pain, disability or insomnia. For these people there is a temptation to use alcohol to self-medicate - they escape temporarily from negative experiences and feelings. Alcohol may seem to offer relief in the short term, but it often makes the problems worse or impairs the person's ability to come to terms with them or find solutions to them. People who drink to relieve stress can very quickly become psychologically dependent on alcohol and can come to believe they can't cope without it.

If you're caring for an older person

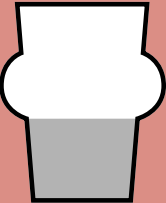



If an older person in your care appears confused and their co-ordination seems to be deteriorating, get an expert diagnosis. Sometimes alcohol problems are overlooked or mis-diagnosed as senile dementia. On the other hand, diabetes or Parkinson's Disease occasionally go undiagnosed because a person is known to enjoy a drink. Be alcohol-aware - but don't jump to conclusions!

Carers themselves may become overtired or anxious and may be at risk of drinking to relieve stress. It is important to look after your own health and to seek help and support sooner rather than later.

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To avoid problems developing, it is wise to observe a few basic rules:

- 1 Allow yourself at least 3-4 alcohol-free days per week.
- 2 Limit your intake to (men) 4 units maximum and (women) 2 units maximum per session.
- 3 Don't mix alcohol and other drugs.
- 4 Don't drink and drive.
- 5 Avoid drinking on an empty stomach.
- 6 Dilute spirits and sip drinks slowly, don't gulp them down.
- 7 Don't drink because you're feeling low.

One Unit	One Unit	One Unit	One Unit
			
1/2 pint(284ml) of ordinary strength beer, lager or cider	1 small glass (125ml) of wine	1 single measure (25ml) of spirits	1 small glass (50ml) of sherry or port
3.5%ABV †	8%ABV †	40%ABV †	20%ABV †

This applies to England and Wales. In N Ireland a pub measure equals 1 1/2 units; in Scotland 1 1/4 or 1 1/2 units

† ABV means Alcohol By Volume. These strengths appear on all labels

If you are worried about your own or someone else's drinking, you can talk in confidence to an Advice Worker/Counsellor. The telephone numbers are listed below.

0115 941 4747

Lo-call 0845 762 6316

Minicom 0115 948 5555

9.00am until 7.00pm

Monday through to Friday

Saturdays 9.00am to 1.00pm

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