

Published on *SeniorNavigator* (<https://seniornavigator.org>)

Older Adults and Alcohol

Older Adults

The size of the older adult population is increasing rapidly. Alcohol use among older adults is also increasing. Data from the [2021 National Survey on Drug Use and Health](#) indicate that approximately 20 percent of adults aged 60-64 and around 11 percent over age 65 report current binge drinking. Older adults can experience a variety of problems from drinking alcohol, especially those who:

- Take certain medications
- Have health problems
- Drink heavily

There are special considerations facing older adults who drink, including:

Increased Sensitivity to Alcohol

Aging can lower the body's tolerance for alcohol. Older adults generally experience the effects of alcohol more quickly than when they were younger. This puts older adults at higher risks for falls, car crashes, and other unintentional injuries that may result from drinking.

Increased Health Problems

Certain health problems are common in older adults. [Heavy drinking](#) can make these problems worse, including:

- Diabetes
- High blood pressure
- Congestive heart failure
- Liver problems
- Osteoporosis

- Memory problems
- Mood disorders

Bad Interactions with Medications

Many prescription and over-the-counter medications, as well as herbal remedies can be dangerous or even deadly when mixed with alcohol. Medications that can interact badly with alcohol include:

- Aspirin
- Acetaminophen
- Cold and allergy medicine
- Cough syrup
- Sleeping pills
- Pain medication
- Anxiety or depression medicine

Guidelines for Alcohol Consumption

Developed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Agriculture, the [2020-2025 dietary guidelines](#) provide recommendations on what the average American should eat and drink to promote health and help prevent chronic disease. To help older adults minimize risks associated with drinking, the dietary guidelines state that older adults can choose not to drink or limit intakes to 2 drinks or less in a day for men and 1 drink or less in a day for women, when alcohol is consumed.

Certain older adults should avoid drinking alcohol completely, including those who:

- Plan to drive or operate machinery, or participate in activities that require skill, coordination, and alertness
- Take certain over-the-counter or prescription medications
- Have a medical condition that can be worsened by alcohol
- Are recovering from AUD or are unable to control the amount they drink

Article Source

National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism

Source URL

<https://www.niaaa.nih.gov>

Last Reviewed

Monday, January 15, 2024