



Care Partner Information

Tips for Providing Older Adult Care

Alcohol and Falls

Falls are a common cause of injury in older adults. However, falls are not a “normal” part of aging. Adults age 65 and older should be checked for fall risk each year.

Alcohol use can increase fall risk. More older adults drink today than in the past. Many older adults will have a drink to help them relax, or as part of a social event. They may also drink because they are bored, depressed, anxious or have difficulty sleeping.

The number of older adults who drink heavily is increasing. Experts recommend that older adults should have no more than seven drinks a week, and no more than three drinks on any one day. Older adults who drink more than this are at higher risk of falling and other health issues.

Health Issues from Drinking
Liver damage and cancer
Immune system problems
Worsening of osteoporosis, diabetes and high blood pressure
Stomach ulcers
Forgetfulness, confusion and brain damage

It can be dangerous to mix alcohol with prescriptions, over-the-counter, or herbal medicines. The medicines most likely to be dangerous with alcohol are cold and allergy medicines, cough syrups, laxatives, pain, anxiety, or depression medicines. An older adult should ask their healthcare provider or pharmacist if they can safely drink alcohol while taking a medicine.

This Care Partner Information page is part of a series on older adult caregiving tips. They are written to help family and community caregivers, direct care workers and community health representatives care for older adults. Available in English and Spanish at www.aging.arizona.edu

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Not everyone who drinks daily has a drinking problem. And, not all problem drinkers have to drink every day. Questions to ask an older adult: Do you have more than seven drinks a week? Do you drink more than three drinks in any single day? If so, they should be aware of their increased fall risk.

People often under-estimate how much liquor is in one drink.

Older adults should drink no more than 7 drinks in a week, or three in a day.
One drink is...
One 12 ounce bottle or can of beer, or wine cooler
One 8 or 9 ounce bottle or can of ale or malt liquor
One 5 ounce glass of red, rose or white wine
One 1.5-ounce shot glass of hard liquor including vodka, scotch, gin, tequila or whiskey (60 to 80 proof or less).

Many older adults decide to cut back or stop drinking alcohol. Here are some tips you can give to help:

1. Count how many drinks you have each day using the chart above.
2. Decide how many days a week you want to drink. Plan some “dry” days.
3. Choose water, juice, or soda in place of alcohol.
4. Make sure to eat before and while drinking.
5. Develop healthy interests that don’t involve alcohol.
6. Avoid people, places, and times of day that may trigger your drinking.
7. Plan what you will do if you have an urge to drink.
8. Learn to say “no, thanks” when you’re offered an alcoholic drink.
9. Find a support group for older people with alcohol problems, or check out quit programs, like AA (Alcoholics Anonymous).
10. Locate an individual, family, or group therapist who specializes in drinking.

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