

ALCOHOL USE AMONGST OLDER ADULTS

DID YOU KNOW...

- Three-quarters of Canadians aged 55-64 drink alcohol, either occasionally or regularly. This dips to 67% for people aged 65-74. Amongst people aged 75 and over, about one half are occasional or regular drinkers. (Statistics Canada, 1998-99).
- Alcohol intake can contribute to falls in the elderly.
- Because older adults have a lower body water content they need less alcohol to become intoxicated and they can suffer damage to organ systems and tissues with smaller quantities of alcohol.
- Signs of alcohol and/or medication use which may resemble signs of aging are:
 - confusion/ disorientation
 - memory loss
 - slowed thought process
 - loss of muscle coordination/ balance
 - irregular heartbeat
 - tremors
 - high blood pressure
 - upset stomach
 - depression
 - malnutrition, dehydration



Does This Sound Familiar?

Mac, 75, recently fell at home. A neighbour brought him to the hospital for an examination. He was treated for a cut on his forehead but suffered no other injuries. He told the ER nurse that he had fallen several times in the past year but never hurt himself. He was sent home with CCAC (Home Care) follow-up.

A case manager visits Mac. He tells her he can't find anything to help his "unrelenting pain". Mac was wounded during the Second World War and still has shrapnel embedded in his body which causes severe headaches, back and knee pain. Over the years, Mac has been given many different kinds of painkillers without much relief.

To help deal with the pain, Mac tells the case manager that he has used alcohol on a daily basis for years. His wife moved out two years ago because of his drinking. He is now worried because his doctor told him he is showing the effects of long-term alcohol use - problems with his liver and stomach. He also has memory loss which he thinks is due to his drinking.

Mac is scared about what the alcohol has done to him and says he thinks he should try to stop drinking but he can't see how he could stand the pain. He also thinks he might not be able to sleep without "a stiff drink of Scotch before bed".

The case manager asks if Mac would like help to reduce his drinking and find other ways to manage his pain. She tells him about Addiction Outreach, a free, local, confidential drug and alcohol counselling service. She suggests he talk with his doctor about reviewing his medication to help his pain and sleeplessness. Mac has taken a step towards making a positive change in his life.

Low-Risk Drinking Guidelines

Sometimes we don't know how much alcohol is safe to consume. Potential problems may be avoided by following the low-risk drinking guidelines from the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. Some of the recommendations are:

- ❖ Zero drinks is the lowest risk of alcohol-related problems.
- ❖ Drink no more than two standard drinks* on any day.
- ❖ Men – drink no more than 14 standard drinks* a week, and no more than two on any day.
- ❖ Women – drink no more than 9 standard drinks* a week, and no more than two on any day.
- ❖ If you are taking prescribed or over-the-counter medications or herbal remedies, don't drink any alcohol until you have spoken with your pharmacist and/or doctor.

* Standard drink – 12 oz. regular beer = 5 oz. wine = 1.5 oz. liquor = 3 oz. fortified wine (sherry)

Remember... weight, height and gender play a role in how much alcohol a person can safely consume. Women have less body water and are more sensitive to alcohol's effects!

FOR MORE INFORMATION...

If you or someone you know has a problem with alcohol and you need more information, please call:

Centre for Addiction and Mental Health Information Line: 1-800-463-6273

Addiction Outreach Muskoka-Parry Sound:
In West or East Parry Sound call – 1-800-668-5192
In Muskoka call – 1-800-668-1856

For a copy of the Low-Risk Drinking Guidelines call the Muskoka-Parry Sound Health Unit at (705) 789-8813 or 1-800-563-2808.

Drug-Alcohol Interactions

Alcohol interacts with at least half of the 100 drugs most frequently prescribed for seniors by physicians.

Even common drugs (like Aspirin, Tylenol and oral or injected diabetic medication) when mixed with alcohol can cause serious health problems.

Review your medications often with your doctor and pharmacist, and inform him/her if you do drink alcohol.

This newsletter was prepared by:



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Please feel free to copy and share this newsletter with others.

For more information about RISK contact Muskoka-Parry Sound Health Unit at (705) 789-8813.

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