

# Alcohol & Aging: Impacts of Alcohol Abuse on the Elderly

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The substance most frequently used by older adults (age 65 and up) to alter consciousness is alcohol. That comparatively high rate of usage in the age group has led to an alarming 4% of older adults now struggling with alcohol use disorder (AUD). Surprisingly, an estimated one-third of those people appear to have become addicted later in their lives. Unfortunately, the problem of alcohol abuse among the elderly is under-reported and often untreated.

## How Does Alcohol Affect People as They Age?

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Generally speaking, people are likely to become more sensitive to alcohol effects as they grow older due to the diminished action of a particular enzyme that breaks alcohol down in the body. The enzyme begins to leave higher levels of alcohol in the blood for longer amounts of time. The effects of this can include these, among others:

- Dehydration
- Health problems
- Increased risk of accidents
- Increased sensitivity to alcohol
- Interactions with medications
- Risk of STDs

## Increased Health Problems from Elderly Alcohol Abuse

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Serious alcohol-related health problems can occur in aging adults. Health problems in older adults made worse by frequent alcohol abuse include:

- High blood pressure
- Liver problems
- Diabetes
- Congestive heart failure
- Various heart problems
- Mood disorders
- Memory problems
- Other neurological problems
- Osteoporosis
- Interactions with medications
- STDs
- Premature aging of the skin

## **Interaction of Alcohol and Medications**

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Over 90% of older people take medications to treat chronic health conditions. One of the top health dangers for older adults is alcohol interaction with medications. The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), it is hazardous to mix alcohol with these drugs, among others:

- Pain medication
- Sleeping pills
- Aspirin
- Acetaminophen
- Anti-anxiety medications
- Mood stabilizers
- Cold and allergy medicine
- Cough syrup
- Antidepressants
- Antipsychotics
- Various herbal treatments

## **Alcohol Use as a Safety Hazard for Older Adults**

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NIAAA data reveals that alcohol-related emergency room visits by older adults rose by 50% from 2006 to 2016. Alcohol intoxication raises the risk of injurious accidents, including falls, car crashes, and others. The increased risk is even greater in older adults due to cognitive, sensory, and physical changes that happen in older people. That accounts for the fact that older adults have the highest number of fatal falls. Almost a third of falls by older people result in severe injuries including broken bones, head trauma, and others.

## **Can the Effects of Alcohol be Reversed**

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Alcohol can negatively affect the brain, liver, cardiovascular system, pancreas, immune system, and others. Older adults are more vulnerable to heart disease, liver problems, bone disorders (like osteoporosis), and ulcers. Fortunately, many health problems caused by alcohol abuse can be improved by stopping alcohol use and receiving effective professional treatment.

## **Signs that an Older Person is Abusing Alcohol**

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Alcoholism in the elderly is often unnoticed. Some of the signs can be due to other physical or mental health issues. Note the signs of alcohol abuse in an older adult listed below. These are some of the most common and recognizable warning signs of AUD in older people:

- Cognitive decline
- Self-neglect
- Missing doctor appointments
- Failing to follow prescribed treatments
- Unmanaged hypertension
- Frequent falls or other accidents
- Going to the ER frequently
- Gastrointestinal problems
- Delirium, possibly from alcohol withdrawal
- Estrangement from family
- Lab analysis indicating alcohol abuse

## **Alcohol Treatment Options for Older Adults**

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There are numerous treatment programs for alcoholism in the elderly. It may be beneficial for older people with AUD to be in a rehab program with their peers. Elderly alcohol abuse treatment options are different at different rehab facilities throughout the region. Options include:

- Alcohol education
- Support services
- Medical detox for alcohol
- Inpatient AUD treatment
- Outpatient AUD treatment

## **Convincing an Elderly Alcoholic to Seek Alcohol Treatment**

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Encourage your loved one to practice self-care, seek support, and consider getting treatment. Attending an AUD support group or receiving individual counseling can help older adults overcome alcohol addiction and live the rest of their lives feeling much better physically and enjoying their lives much more happily. Emphasize that your loved one is

not alone and that there is an abundance of support available with just a phone call to Renaissance Ranch Ogden. You can start making changes that can quickly lead to a happy new way of living throughout your retirement years.

## **Alcoholism Rehab for Older Adults at Renaissance Ranch**

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If you are an older adult suffering from alcohol addiction or want to help a loved one who needs treatment, you need the best possible resources. Renaissance Ranch offers a serene and inspiring alcohol treatment setting in Utah, with some of the state's best rehab professionals providing diagnosis, treatment, and relapse prevention.

**Call Renaissance Ranch Ogden at (385) 222-3737, or contact us here online for information or to schedule your free consultation and assessment by our supportive alcohol treatment team.**

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