

As You Age...

A Guide to Aging, Medicines, and Alcohol



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
Food and Drug Administration
www.samhsa.gov
www.fda.gov



As we age, the need to take more and different kinds of medications tends to increase. Also, growing older means that our bodies respond differently to alcohol and to medication than when we were younger.

You should be aware that:

- Some of your medicines won't mix well with other medications, including over-the-counter medications and herbal remedies.
- Many medications do not mix well with alcohol.
- Changes in body weight can influence the amount of medicine you need to take and how long it stays in your body. Body circulation may slow down, which can affect how quickly drugs get to the liver and kidneys. In addition, the liver and kidneys may work slower, which can affect how a drug breaks down and is eliminated from the body. Due to these changes, medicine may remain in your body longer and create a greater chance of interaction.

To guard against potential problems with medicines, become knowledgeable about your medication and how it makes you feel.

Take steps on your own:

- Read the labels of your medications carefully, and follow the directions.
- Look for pictures or statements on your prescriptions and pill bottles that tell you not to drink alcohol while taking the particular medication. If you are taking medications for sleeping, pain, anxiety, or depression, it is unsafe to drink alcohol.
- One alcoholic drink a day is the recommended limit for anyone over the age of 65 who has not been diagnosed with a drinking problem. That's 12 ounces of beer, 1.5 ounces of distilled spirits, or 5 ounces of wine.
- Talk to your health care professional about all medicines you take, including prescription; over-the-counter (OTC) medications; and dietary supplements, vitamins, and herbals.
- Tell your doctor about any food or medicine allergies you have.
- Keep track of side effects, and let your doctor know immediately about any unexpected symptoms or changes in the way you feel.
- Go through your medicine cabinet at least once a year to get rid of old or expired medicines.
- Have all of your medicine reviewed by your doctor at least once a year.

Medicine and alcohol misuse can happen unintentionally.



Here are some signals that may indicate an alcohol or medication-related problem:

- Memory trouble after having a drink or taking medicine
- Loss of coordination (walking unsteadily, frequent falls)
- Changes in sleeping habits
- Unexplained bruises
- Being unsure of yourself
- Irritability, sadness, depression
- Unexplained chronic pain
- Changes in eating habits
- Wanting to stay alone a lot of the time
- Failing to bathe or keep clean
- Having trouble finishing sentences
- Having trouble concentrating
- Difficulty staying in touch with family or friends
- Lack of interest in usual activities

Do you think you may be having trouble with alcohol or medications? Do you want to avoid a problem? Here are some things you can do:

Talk to someone you trust:

- Talk with your doctor or other health care professional. They can check for any problems you may be having and discuss treatment options with you.
- Ask for advice from a staff member at a senior center or other program in which you participate.
- Share your concerns with a friend, family member, or spiritual advisor.

Share the right information with your health care professional:

- Make a list for your doctor of all your medications.
- Remind your doctor or pharmacist about any previous conditions that might affect your ability to take certain medicines, such as allergies, a stroke, hypertension, serious heart disease, liver problems, or lung disease.
- Don't be afraid to ask questions if you want more information.
- Whenever possible, have your doctor or a member of the medical staff give you written advice or instructions.

List your prescription and over-the-counter medicines as well as your dietary supplements and herbal preparations.

What do I use it for?	When do I take it?	How much do I take?	Name of my medicine:
<i>Arthritis</i>	<i>Morning</i>	<i>1 tablet 400 mg</i>	<i>Brand X</i>

In the case of an emergency, call 911.

To talk to a health care information specialist about possible alcohol or drug misuse or for dependency treatment referral, call the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services

Administration at:

(800) 662-HELP (4357)

TDD (800) 487-4889

or visit

www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov

For more information about your medicines, contact the Food and Drug Administration at:

888-INFO-FDA (463-6332)

www.fda.gov

Check the box below to see if a local program or provider has listed its address and/or phone number.

For Health Care Professionals

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Printed 2004, SMA 04-3940



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