

Caregiver Assistance News

"Caring for You - Caring for Others"

Area Agency on Aging District 7, Inc.

*Serving Adams, Brown, Gallia, Highland, Jackson, Lawrence, Pike,
Ross, Scioto and Vinton Counties in Ohio*

www.aaa7.org **Helping You Age Better!**



APRIL 2012

Medication and Alcohol

A Combination with Sometimes Fatal Results

Recent studies find that as many as 2.5 million older adults (about 17 percent of the over-65 population) have alcohol-related problems. Most older adults aren't even aware of the risk, but if the person in your care takes more than three drinks a day, he or she is at increased risk for serious health problems:

- Alcohol-related diseases reduce a person's lifespan, on average, by six to 29 years.
- There is a greater risk of dying of stroke or heart attack if a person has one or more hangovers a month.
- Alcohol is a proven cause of cancer, second only to smoking.
- People who drink in excess are at higher risk of hardening of the arteries and heart disease.
- Long-term heavy alcohol use leads to muscle disease and peripheral neuropathy (numbness in hands and feet) that impairs the ability to walk.
- Alcohol abuse impairs the memory, both while drinking and in the long-term.
- Regular alcohol consumption increases the likelihood of weight gain. Gaining weight leads to other health problems, like diabetes and joint damage.
- Alcohol may interact badly with other medications, including over-the-counter medicines. This can make

these medications not work properly, not work at all, or cause dangerous side effects.

- Alcohol is the major cause of serious liver disorders. Because many important medications are processed through the liver, liver damage can make it much harder to control some illnesses.
- Heavy drinking can make high blood sugar (diabetes) worse.
- Heavy drinking can cause weak bones (osteoporosis), which leads to fractures.
- Alcohol abuse can cause or worsen mood disorders, such as depression and anxiety.

Hidden Dangers

People don't have to be drinking more than usual to be at risk; even those who drink the same amount as they did when they were younger are at risk because, in older individuals, blood alcohol levels become higher faster and stay higher longer than in younger people. Also, older adults use more prescription and over-the-counter remedies which can be dangerous or deadly when mixed with alcohol.

Did You Know?

- Taking aspirin with alco-

hol raises the chance of bleeding in your stomach.

- Some cough syrups and cold and allergy medications have a high amount of alcohol in them. Drinking alcohol with these can make you dangerously sleepy.
- Drinking alcohol while taking some sleeping pills, pain pills, or anxiety or depression medicine can be very dangerous, causing unconsciousness, coma, or even death.
- You can damage your liver if you drink and take a lot of painkillers that contain acetaminophen (Tylenol).

Source: National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism; National Institutes of Health



Self Evaluation - Recognize the Warning Signs

- Do you ever underestimate how much you drink?
- Do you miss meals after a few drinks because you don't feel hungry?
- Does having a few drinks help decrease your shakiness or tremors?
- Does alcohol sometimes make it hard for you to remember things?
- Do you usually take a drink to relax or calm your nerves?
- Have you ever increased your drinking after experiencing a loss in your life?
- Has a doctor or nurse ever expressed concern about your drinking?
- When you feel lonely, does having a drink help?
- Are you walking unsteadily, having falls and unexplained bruises?
- Have you been sleeping more or less, or having trouble staying asleep?
- Do you feel unsure of yourself?
- Do you often feel irritable or depressed and does a drink help you feel better?
- Do you have chronic pain and does a drink help you feel better?
- Do you "want to be left alone" much of the time and do you drink alone?
- Do you sometimes forget to bathe or change your clothes?
- Do you have trouble concentrating?



A "yes" to two or more questions suggests an alcohol problem that should be addressed.

Healthy U

"Healthy U" is a program made possible by a joint effort of the Administration on Aging, the National Council on Aging, the Ohio Department of Aging, the Ohio Department of Health, and the Area Agency on Aging District 7.

Participants in the Healthy U program will gain needed support in addition to a number of other benefits including:

- Learning practical ways to deal with pain, fatigue and depression
- Discovering ways to be more physically active
- Learning how to eat healthier
- Learning better ways to talk with your physician and family about your health
- Setting personal goals
- Finding ways to relax and deal with stress

There are two upcoming Chronic Disease Self Management Classes scheduled to begin soon. (See information below.)

Chronic Disease Self-Management Class in Jackson County

Location: Holzer Medical Center-Jackson - 500 Burlington Road, Jackson, Ohio 45640

Date: Classes begin April 30, 2012, and will be held every Monday through June 4, 2012

Time of Class: 1:00 pm - 3:30 pm

Contact: Rachael Kearns or Charity McDermott at 740-395-8500 to Pre-Register

Chronic Disease Self-Management Class in Pike County

Location: Bristol Court - 600 East 5th Street, Waverly, Ohio 45690

Date: Classes begin May 2, 2012, and will be held every Wednesday through June 6, 2012

Time of Class: 9:30 am - 12 Noon

Contact: Lisa Tackett at 740-947-7035 to Pre-Register



"Our greatest glory is not in never failing, but in rising every time we fall." - Confucius

Taking Care of Yourself - Try Just Picturing It

Wishful thinking isn't necessarily a waste of time. Visualization can help you through a stressful situation by providing a "dress rehearsal."

Say you need to have a difficult conversation with someone. Close your eyes. Imagine the outcome you'd like to have: a calm conversation in which you're able to express yourself and suggest improvements, and the other person smiling and nodding in understanding.

There's no guarantee how the event will really go, but visualizing it before you start will leave you feeling calmer and better prepared.

Source: www.caring.com



Good Tip

If trying to cut out alcohol, just say "No thanks" and "It doesn't agree with my medications," or simply, "Doctor's orders." A person of any age should never feel pressured to drink.

Live Life Laughing



First Man: "I think I am going to quit cold turkey."

Second Man: "You mean drinking and smoking?"

First Man: "No, cold turkey."

To Become Alcohol-Free

Help the person choose individual, group or family therapy, depending on what works for them.

- Find a support group for older adults with alcohol problems.
- Talk to a health care professional; ask about medicines that might help.
- Visit a trained counselor who knows about alcohol problems and how they affect older adults.
- Encourage the person to join a 12-step program such as Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). AA offers support and programs for people who want to quit drinking.





Area Agency on Aging District 7, Inc.

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Your local Area Agency on Aging District 7, Inc. serves the following counties in Ohio: Adams, Brown, Gallia, Highland, Jackson, Lawrence, Pike, Ross, Scioto and Vinton.

Services are rendered on a non-discriminatory basis. Those interested in learning more about the services provided through the

Area Agency on Aging District 7 can call toll-free at 1-800-582-7277. Here, individuals can talk directly with a nurse or social worker who will assist them with information surrounding the programs and services that are available to best serve their needs. The Agency can also be reached via e-mail at info@aaa7.org.

Prescription Medicine Abuse

Older adults are especially vulnerable to prescription drug dependence and addiction. The changing metabolisms of older individuals can intensify the effects of drugs and alcohol.

Remember, even a small amount of alcohol, in combination with certain prescription medications, can suppress breathing - with fatal results.

It's also essential not to combine drugs - prescription or not - without consulting your health practitioner. Caregivers can help by discouraging older adults from using pain killers and sedatives unless *absolutely necessary*. Remind them to *always* avoid alcohol when taking painkillers or sedatives.

- Bring all their medications to the doctor when they go for their yearly checkups so that the physician has a record of exactly what they are taking.
- Check medication use - prescription and over-the-counter - and be sure they understand label warnings and the dangers of drug interaction.
- Discard outdated prescription and over-the-counter medications.
- Know what medications the person in your care is taking and why.

