Alcohol and Older Adults

Anyone at any age can have an alcohol problem. Sometimes changes in an older person’s life can lead to problem drinking. Problems with alcohol are not always readily recognized because they may be mistaken for other conditions related to aging.

How the body handles alcohol can change with age. It might not take as much alcohol to feel drunk, and this can increase susceptibility to accidents, including falls and car crashes.

Drinking too much alcohol over a long period of time can lead to additional health problems such as cancer and liver damage. It can worsen current conditions such as diabetes and high blood pressure, and make other conditions harder to detect and treat. Other problems such as forgetfulness can be mistaken for Alzheimer’s disease.

Alcohol and medicines
Many drugs, whether they are over the counter, prescription, or herbal remedies, become dangerous and even deadly when mixed with alcohol. Depending on the type of medicine, doing so can result in the following:

- Increased risk of stomach or intestinal bleeding
- Extreme drowsiness
- Liver damage
- Higher blood alcohol levels because of the alcohol in the medication
- Talk to your doctor about the potential effects of drinking alcohol while on medication.

Recommended limit
The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism recommends that people who are healthy and over age 65 consume no more than seven drinks a week and no more than three drinks on any one day. One drink is defined as one of the following:
One 12-ounce can or bottle of regular beer, ale, or wine cooler
One 8- or 9-ounce can or bottle of malt liquor
One 5-ounce glass of red or white wine
One 1.5-ounce shot glass of hard liquor (spirits) like gin, vodka, or whiskey that is 80 proof or less

If you or someone you know is struggling with substance use, call the Recovery Helpline at 1-866-789-1511.