

Alcoholism & Abuse in the Senior Population

Alcohol consumption among older adults in the U.S. has grown steadily over the past couple of decades. During the period 2002-06, an average of 2.8m adults over age fifty suffered from substance abuse, including alcoholism. By 2020, these numbers are projected to double, totaling roughly 5.7m seniors. It is estimated that 70% of all hospitalized older persons & up to 50% of nursing home residents have alcohol-related problems! Contributing factors to alcohol abuse include depression, loneliness, emotional stress, boredom, & loss of a loved one. This is dangerous because alcohol abuse can lead to alcoholism.

COMMON SIGNS of alcohol abuse among older persons include: drinking @home (bar costs, can't drive); drinking before, with, & after dinner; neglects appearance; wt. loss/gain; memory loss; irrational fears, delusions, and unusual stress. Remember, these (signs) are often attributed to other diseases (see "Conflicting Signs"). However, many older people find once they stop drinking & have prescriptions adjusted, these symptoms disappear (of people 65yrs & over, 83% take Rx drugs, & over one-half of all Rx's for older persons have some sedative). Combined with alcohol, this can be deadly at any age!

CONFLICTING SIGNS that may be alcohol-related in the older population can sometimes be mistaken for other conditions related to aging, e.g. a problem with balance could actually be an alcohol problem; forgetfulness and/or acting confused can be mistaken for Alzheimer's disease. Alcohol dependency can sometimes cause change in blood vessels, which can result in dulling pain; that pain could be a warning sign of heart attack.

If you know someone who exhibits signs or symptoms of possible alcohol dependency, helping them get the assistance they need could send a message of caring, and you may help save a life.

REFERENCES:

- AARP.org/health/healthy-living/info
- AARP bulletin 11/16/2017
- Alcohol Abuse soars for Older Americans.org
- www.alcohol rehab guide.org

RESOURCES:

- General Advice 888-875-6083 (free 24 hr.)
- Alcohol and drugs rehab.com/rehab-finder

You may also want to contact an Alcoholism Counselor, Psychologist, Doctor, minister, or social worker. They will help you evaluate your options and look @ the situation more objectively.

St. Columba Health Ministry

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