

CARE TALK CHANGE

LEARN ALCOHOL BASICS

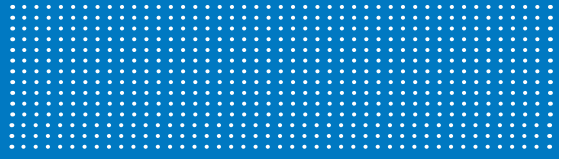
Information for **OLDER ADULTS**



Virginia Alcoholic Beverage
Control Authority
Community Health & Engagement
Publication Series



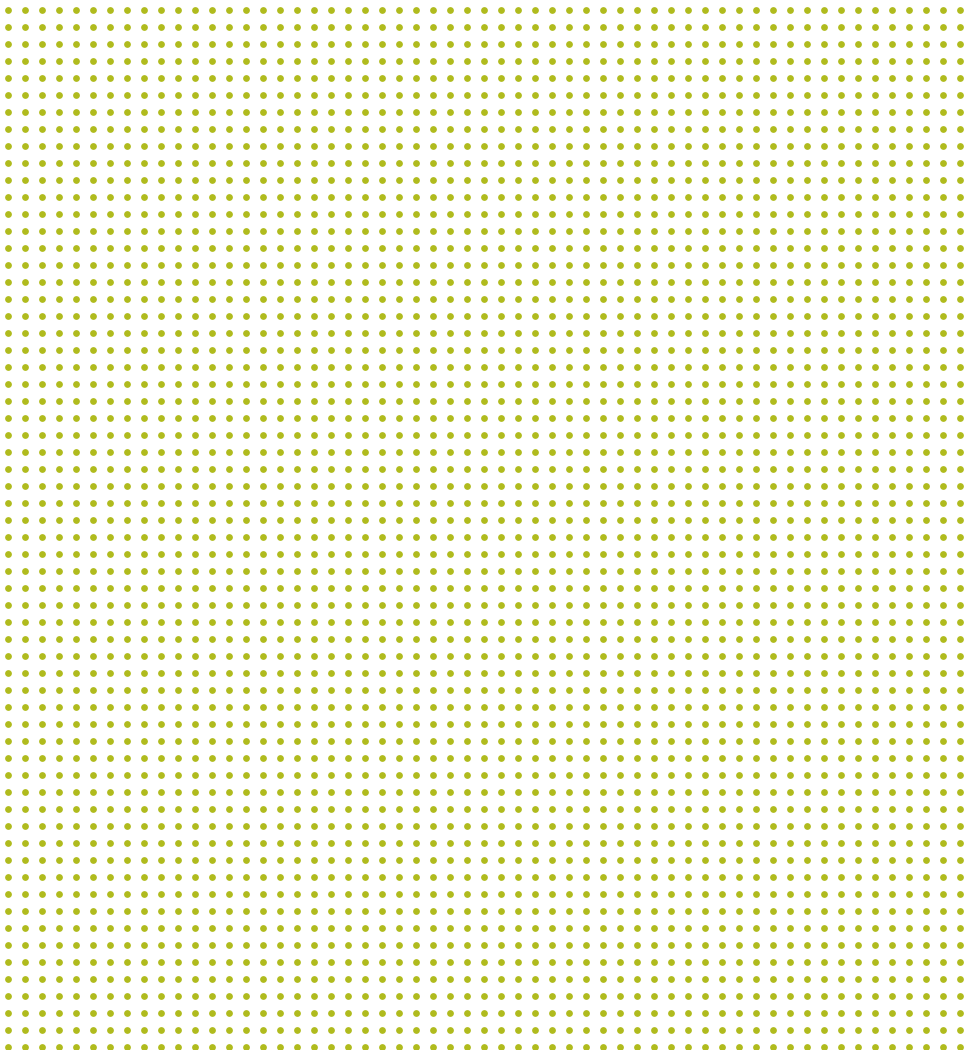
CONTENTS



Introduction.....	2
Alcohol misuse in later life—a growing problem	3
What are some signs of alcohol misuse in older adults?.....	4
Physical changes make alcohol more risky	6
What is blood alcohol concentration (BAC)?	7
How can I minimize my risk?.....	8
Alcohol and medications can be a dangerous combination!	8
Do you know how much you are drinking?	9
Drinking and driving don't mix!.....	10
Be a good role model for younger generations	10
Always lock up alcohol and medications	11
What are the signs of alcohol poisoning?	11
Am I at risk of an alcohol use disorder?	12
Help is available.....	13
Tips for being a responsible drinker	14
Resources	15

INTRODUCTION

Many enriching experiences await you in the second half of life—such as mentoring young people and enjoying greater freedom to travel, volunteer and explore new hobbies. To enhance your health and safety during this time of your life, it's very important to understand that physical changes, medications and other factors may cause dangerous interactions and outcomes from alcohol use. As you age, it is important to consider how your choices can positively and negatively affect the quality of your life.



“AGING IS NOT LOST YOUTH BUT A NEW STAGE OF OPPORTUNITY AND STRENGTH.” **BETTY FRIEDAN**

Alcohol Misuse in Later Life— A Growing Problem

Alcohol misuse is a growing problem among older adults. Age-related and life-changing events such as retirement, health issues, additional caregiving responsibilities and mourning the loss of loved ones can make you more susceptible to increased alcohol consumption. Sometimes these issues can be overlooked because some of the signs and symptoms of alcohol misuse in older adults mirror those of aging, depression and dementia.



What Are Some Signs of Alcohol Misuse in Older Adults?

Some of the signs and symptoms of alcohol misuse in older adults include:



Frequent and unexplained injuries



Neglect of personal hygiene



Mood swings



Depression or anxiety



Change in sleep patterns and eating habits



Slurred speech



Unsteady movement



The smell of alcohol on breath

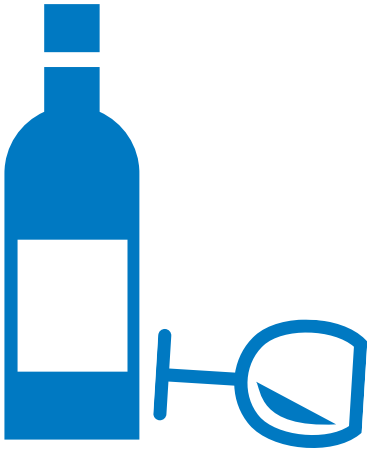


Confusion or forgetfulness



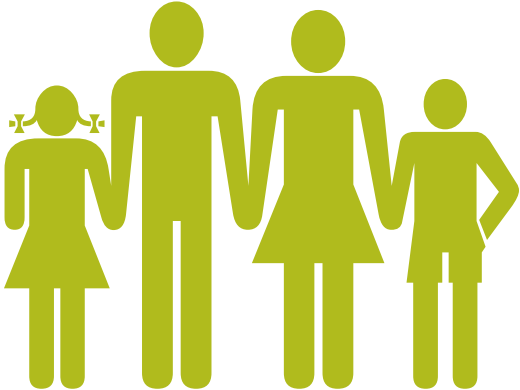
Isolation from family and friends

Sometimes even trained medical providers can fail to diagnose an alcohol problem. Alcohol misuse late in life is a "hidden epidemic." Not only is it hidden from medical providers, but alcohol misuse often occurs in private, away from family, friends and neighbors.



Some drinking habits remain hidden because older adults may be embarrassed and don't know how to ask for help. They may not want to be labeled or feel like they are causing a burden.

Friends and family members may be in denial about a drinking problem or are uncomfortable discussing this issue. It's important to discuss potential problems and show support and concern without being judgmental. It's healthy to talk about responsible alcohol consumption across the lifespan. By raising the topic you can help normalize conversations about alcohol.



Physical Changes Make Alcohol More Risky

Because of physical changes that occur with aging, you will generally experience the effects of alcohol more quickly, and more dramatically, than when you were younger. As we get older, we metabolize, or break down, alcohol slower than we did when we were younger. This causes alcohol to stay in our bodies longer.

Some of the physical changes that make alcohol riskier:

- The amount of water in the body decreases
 - The proportion of body fat to lean muscle increases
 - The liver becomes less efficient processing alcohol
-

As a result, you have a higher percentage of alcohol in your blood than younger people after drinking the same amount of alcohol! This increases your risk for falls, car crashes and additional medical problems.



Most importantly, you can develop problems with alcohol even if your drinking habits have not changed.

What is Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC)?

BAC is the amount of alcohol that is present in the bloodstream. For example, having a BAC of 0.10 percent means that a person has one part alcohol per 1,000 parts blood present in the body. At certain BAC levels, alcohol has been shown to alter a person's visual functions and perceptions, affecting his or her ability to react, concentrate or pay attention, process information and operate a vehicle. There is nothing you can do to quickly eliminate alcohol from your body. Only time will reduce the amount of alcohol in your bloodstream. It is important to keep track off he number of drinks you consume and understand how alcohol impacts your body.



Remember: Due to the physical changes that are normal with aging, an older adult will become more impaired, and have a higher BAC, than a younger person who consumed the same amount of alcohol.

BAC estimators are normally not as accurate for older adults since they are usually designed for younger people.

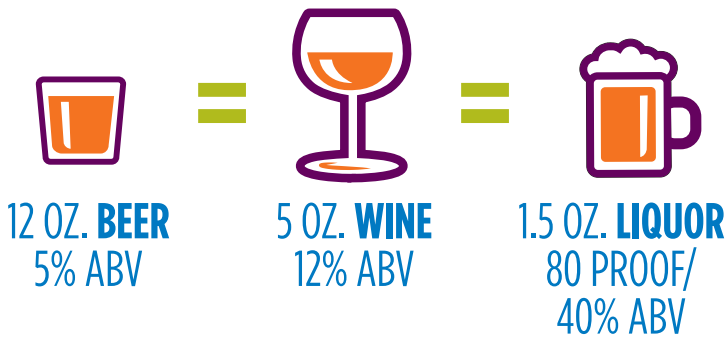
“THE LONGER I LIVE THE MORE BEAUTIFUL LIFE BECOMES.”

FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT

Do You Know How Much You Are Drinking?

It is important to understand what constitutes a standard size drink. Standard size drinks contain approximately the same amount of alcohol and help estimate BAC.

A Standard Drink Is:



Remember: Some wines and beers contain a higher percentage of alcohol than others and not all mixed beverages are made with the same amount of liquor. For example, a Long Island Iced Tea includes multiple shots of alcohol that could equal up to three drinks in one glass.

How Can I Minimize My Risk?

The National Institutes of Health recommend that adults older than 65, who are healthy and do not take medications, follow these limits:

- ➔ No more than seven standard drinks per week
- ➔ For **males**, no more than two drinks in a day
- ➔ For **females**, 1 drink or less in a day



Drinking more than these amounts puts you at risk of serious alcohol problems. **CAUTION: If you have a health problem or take certain medications, you may need to drink less or not at all!**

Drinking alcohol can make these common health problems worse:

- Diabetes
- High blood pressure
- Congestive heart failure
- Stroke
- Liver problems
- Osteoporosis
- Memory problems
- Mood disorders

Alcohol and Medications Can Be A Dangerous Combination!

If you are taking medications, it is important to be aware of possible interactions with, and reactions to, alcohol. Many medicines—prescription, over-the-counter, or herbal remedies—can be dangerous or even fatal when mixed with alcohol. Before taking any medicine, talk to your doctor or pharmacist about whether it is safe to drink alcohol with your medications.



Some of the medications that can have dangerous interactions with alcohol include:

ASPIRIN • ACETAMINOPHEN • COLD AND ALLERGY MEDICATION • COUGH SYRUP
SLEEPING AIDS • PAIN MEDICATION • ANXIETY OR DEPRESSION MEDICATION

According to the National Institutes of Health
(<https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/alcohols-effects-health/special-populations-co-occurring-disorders/older-adults>)



Drinking and Driving

Don't Mix!

Your life and the lives of others are at risk every time a driver gets behind the wheel after drinking. Impairment can begin with the first drink. You do not have to be drunk to be considered intoxicated or under the influence of alcohol. Driving skills and abilities, such as judgement, reaction time and motor coordination are impaired in most people long before they exhibit visible signs of drunkenness. Know that buzzed driving is drunk driving.

The Commonwealth of Virginia defines the legal limit for driving while intoxicated at a BAC of .08 for those 21 years of age and older. Violators are guilty of a Class 1 misdemeanor and, upon conviction, face a fine of up to \$2,500, a year in jail, and/or 50 hours of community service. Violators may also lose their driver's license for up to one year.

As early as age 60, but more frequently after the age of 75, driving skills tend to decline. This decline is especially true of older adult drivers who take certain medications or have conditions associated with the aging process such as vision problems, arthritis, diabetes, strokes, Parkinson's disease or Alzheimer's disease.

Be a Good Role Model For Younger Generations

Your children, grandchildren and community members may look to you as a role model and be influenced by your behavior. Make responsible, healthy choices related to alcohol!

- Never purchase alcohol for someone younger than 21 or allow them to consume alcohol at your event. This is called social providing; it is illegal and dangerous.
- When you host parties, don't make alcohol the focus. Put yourself in the mind of a non-drinker. Don't force drinks on your guests or rush to refill their glasses right away. Some guests may accept drinks they don't want in order to avoid appearing rude.
- Don't let people drink and drive. Car pooling and cabs can save lives. It's the responsibility of everyone (especially the host of the party) to stop drinkers from driving. If necessary, take away the car keys and invite guests to spend the night.
- Use only **non-drinking** designated drivers.
- Engage in healthy activities that don't include drinking alcohol. Don't rely on alcohol to make a social situation more comfortable or fun.

Always Lock Up Alcohol and Medications

Even if you live alone, it's important to lock up your alcohol and medications. This will help protect you from theft and will prevent these substances from being accessed by anyone other than you. In many cases, adolescents have access to alcohol through family members or can find it home. Locking up alcohol and medications protects you and others!



What Are the Signs of Alcohol Poisoning?

Alcohol poisoning happens when a toxic amount of alcohol is consumed, resulting in a high BAC. A large volume of alcohol in the bloodstream causes the body and its major functioning organs like the brain to consequently shut down.

Know the signs of alcohol poisoning and be prepared to call 911 if anyone has the following symptoms:

A central illustration of a green bottle with a skull and crossbones on its label and a green wine glass next to it.

CONFUSION

SLOW OR NO REFLEXES OR RESPONSE

VOMITING

TROUBLE BREATHING

CLAMMY, PALE OR BLUISH LIPS

SEIZURES

DIFFICULTY OR INABILITY TO REMAIN CONSCIOUS

Am I At Risk of an Alcohol Use Disorder



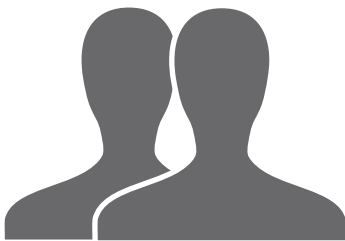
An alcohol use disorder (AUD), or alcoholism, is when drinking starts to become a problem to the individual and those around them. It is important to recognize if you display any symptoms of AUD and to immediately seek help.

To assess whether you or a loved one may have an AUD, here are some questions to ask.

- Have you ever tried to cut down on your drinking?
- Do you get annoyed when people talk about your drinking?
- Do you ever feel guilty about your drinking?
- Do you ever have an "eye-opener" in the morning?
- Have you ever increased your drinking after experiencing a loss in your life?
- After a few drinks, have you sometimes not eaten or skipped a meal because you didn't feel hungry?
- Does alcohol sometimes make it hard for you to remember parts of the day or night?
- Has a doctor or nurse ever said they were worried or concerned about your drinking?
- Have you had times when you ended up drinking more, or longer than you intended?
- Have you experienced craving — a strong need, or urge, to drink?
- Continued to drink even though it was causing trouble with your family or friends?

- Given up or cut back on activities that were important or interesting to you, or gave you pleasure, in order to drink?
- Continued to drink even though it was making you feel depressed or anxious or adding to another health problem? Or after having had a memory blackout?
- Found that when the effects of alcohol were wearing off, you had withdrawal symptoms, such as trouble sleeping, shakiness, irritability, anxiety, depression, restlessness, nausea, or sweating? Or sensed things that were not there?

If you answered yes to one or more of these questions, consult your doctor or health care provider.



Help is Available

If you believe you have a problem with alcohol, or if you are a friend, family member or caregiver of an older adult who may need help with alcohol or substance misuse, contact a primary care physician or a geriatrician who specializes in addictions. Older adults who seek help and undergo treatment for an alcohol problem experience great success. It is never too late to make a positive change!

You may also seek assistance at one or more of the following:

- **Alcoholics Anonymous**
- **Alcoholism counselors, social workers, psychologists and clergy**
- **Alcoholism treatment centers**
- **An area agency on aging**
- **Senior Navigator at www.seniornavigator.org**

Tips for Being A Responsible Drinker



Know the alcohol limit recommendations for older adults.



Talk to your doctor or pharmacist about drinking alcohol while you are on any medications.



Know what a standard drink size is so that you can accurately count your drinks.



Do not drink on an empty stomach. Eat foods high in protein and healthy fats before, during and after you drink.



Pace yourself and do not consume more than one standard size drink each hour. Alternate between an alcoholic beverage, water and food.



Be aware of urges to drink. Don't use having a good or bad day as an excuse for drinking excessively.



Say "no" when you are offered a drink but don't want one. Be prepared with a solid reason and remain firm in your decision.



Be responsible for yourself and those around you. Lock up your alcohol and never provide it to anyone younger than 21 years old.



Never drink and drive! Do not let your friends and family drink and drive either. Always have a plan to get home safely.

VIRGINIA ABC COMMUNITY HEALTH AND ENGAGEMENT



804-977-7440 education@VirginiaABC.com www.abc.virginia.gov [VirginiaABCEducationAndPrevention](#)

COMMUNITY HEALTH & ENGAGEMENT SERVICES



ALCOHOL EDUCATION AND PREVENTION

Provides prevention programming, trainings and resources in order to eliminate underage and high risk drinking by building capacity for communities to educate individual and prevent alcohol misuse.



YOUTH

Monitors and works to decrease underage drinking in Virginia by planning, developing, implementing, and evaluating statewide alcohol education and prevention programming for youth under 18 years of age involving schools and parents.



ADULT

Monitors and works to decrease underage and high-risk drinking in Virginia by planning, developing, implementing, and evaluating statewide alcohol education and prevention programming for adults aged 18 years and older including Virginia's institutes of higher education.



LICENSEE

Monitors and works to increase licensee understanding of alcohol safety and responsibility and increase licensee compliance rates by planning, developing, implementing, and evaluating statewide alcohol education and prevention programming for licensees.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Works to strengthen communication and engagement with the communities we work in by providing a variety of accessible and meaningful ways for employees to engage in their communities and ways for communities to engage with Virginia ABC.



HEALTH COMMUNICATION AND MARKETING

Further the work of the division and the authority's public health communication by ensuring the proper marketing of Virginia ABC's Community Health & Engagement division and public health and safety programming and we strive to ensure quality resources that are in keeping with health communication best practices are available for internal and external partners to help build their capacity to conduct alcohol education and prevention work.

PUBLIC HEALTH DATA, RESEARCH AND EVALUATION



Increases the quality of the authority's public health and safety work by monitoring alcohol research and trends, measuring the need for new and revised public health and safety programming and ensuring that programming is responsive to current data and science conversations about the dangers and consequences of underage drinking.

IN FY23 WITH THE HELP OF INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL PARTNERS, COMMUNITY HEALTH & ENGAGEMENT...



Worked with **100%** of Virginia's institutes of high learning.



Labeled **8,804** products with responsibility messaging at off-premise licensed locations.



Awarded **10** grants to organizations across Virginia.



Distributed **53,289** educational publications.



Reached **21,400** elementary, middle & high school students.



Trained **18,900** people who sell/serve alcohol in Virginia.





**Virginia Alcoholic Beverage
Control Authority**

www.abc.virginia.gov • (804) 977-7440
7450 Freight Way • Mechanicsville, VA 23116

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