

Caregiver Assistance News

“CARING FOR YOU... CARING FOR OTHERS”

Drug and Alcohol Abuse – Senior Mental Health

The most common mental health problems of the aged are depression, anxiety, dementia (e.g., Alzheimer’s disease), drug and alcohol abuse, and paranoia. The suicide rate is higher for the elderly than for any other age group.

The diagnosis and treatment of a mental disorder can be complicated in an aging population. The elderly often have multiple chronic conditions and multiple medications being prescribed by multiple doctors. They also have possible drug interactions, social isolation, limited mobility, and increased emergency room visits, sometimes with poor follow-up. Alcohol and drug abuse, particularly prescription drug and opioid abuse among *older* adults, is one of the fastest growing health problems in the US.

Alcohol Abuse

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

- There is a greater risk of dying of stroke or heart attack.
- Alcohol is a proven cause of cancer, second only to smoking.

- People who drink to excess are at higher risk of hardening of the arteries and heart disease.
- Long-term heavy alcohol use leads to muscle disease and numbness in hands and feet (peripheral neuropathy), that impairs the ability to walk.
- Alcohol abuse impairs the memory, both while drinking and in the long term.
- Daily alcohol consumption increases the likelihood of weight gain, and gaining weight leads to other health problems, like diabetes and joint damage.
- 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 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.



Women and Alcohol

For women, more than one drink a day can be harmful. Here's why:

- ☆ Women tend to be smaller and proportionately have less body water where alcohol is diluted.
- ☆ Breaking down alcohol is slower in women since their stomach enzymes are less active. This makes the entry of alcohol into the bloodstream more likely.
- ☆ Alcohol has a greater effect on women's driving skills, which can result in a fatal car crash.

Source: www.berkeleywellness.com

Drug Abuse – Opioids and Painkillers

Americans are becoming addicted to opioids, a class of drug that is killing them in record numbers, especially Oxycodone, Percocet or Fentanyl — drugs all classified as opioid painkillers. **People with addiction to these drugs are often older Americans, who are developing addiction through *medical use*.** The death rate is much higher among the elderly than it is in the younger group. Women are also especially vulnerable. If someone in your care is struggling with these drugs, encourage him to talk to an addiction expert.

Insomnia and Depression

Depression in the elderly is often misdiagnosed as dementia or Alzheimer's and some health care professionals may mistakenly think that depression is normal for the elderly. Seniors are often *under-treated* for depression and other mental health problems. However, depression *can* and *should* be treated when it occurs, since untreated depression can delay recovery or worsen outcomes for other illnesses.

Nearly half of all people with depression report trouble sleeping, and people with insomnia are nearly twice as likely to be depressed. Curing insomnia in people with depression could double their chance of a full recovery.



Taking Care of Yourself— To Become Alcohol-free

Help the person in your care choose individual, group, or family therapy, depending on what works for him.

- ✓ Find a support group for older adults with alcohol problems.
- ✓ Talk to a health care professional; ask about medicines that might help.
- ✓ 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.

Mental Health Treatment

The most commonly used therapies consist of psychotherapy, cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), self-help or support groups, stress-management techniques, and medications like antidepressants. A physician with specialized *geriatric* training can be part of the health care team, especially helpful to the person taking multiple medications and/or experiencing symptoms of mental illness.

Live Life Laughing!

I am willing to make some changes to my lifestyle as long as I don't have to do anything different.



Inspiration

A real friend is one who walks in when the rest of the world walks out.

~Walter Winchell

Don't Fall – Be Safe

Antidepressant medication is the number one drug associated with falls in the elderly. This is because many of these drugs have strong sedative properties and can make people clumsy.

Caregiving in The Comfort of Home®

Our Purpose

To provide caregivers with critical information enabling them to do their job with confidence, pride, and competence.

Ordering Info

From the publishers of

*Caregiving in
The Comfort of Home®*

Caregiver Series

available from...

CareTrust Publications LLC
PO Box 10283, Portland, OR 97296
800-565-1533
or www.comfortofhome.com

Comments and suggestions welcome.

©2017 CareTrust Publications LLC.
All rights reserved. Reproduction of any component of this publication is forbidden without a license from the publisher.

Some content in this publication is excerpted from *The Comfort of Home: Caregivers Series*. It is for informational use and not health advice. It is not meant to replace medical care but to supplement it. The publisher assumes no liability with respect to the accuracy, completeness or application of information presented or the reader's misunderstanding of the text.

SAFETY TIPS—Hidden Dangers

Even those who drink the same amount as they did when younger can be at risk. In older people, blood alcohol levels get higher faster and stay high longer than they do in younger people. Also, older people use more prescription and over-the-counter remedies, and these can be dangerous or deadly when mixed with alcohol.

- ★ Taking aspirin with alcohol 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

NEXT ISSUE... BETTER NUTRITION—USING THE SNAP PROGRAM

Caregiver Assistance News

“ C A R I N G F O R Y O U ... C A R I N G F O R O T H E R S ”

Q U I C K Q U I Z

According to the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence there are 2.5 million older adults with an alcohol or drug problem and older adults are hospitalized as often for alcoholic related problems as for heart attacks. Read the issue and answer True or False to the questions below.

1. Curing insomnia in people with depression could double their chance of a full recovery.
T F
2. The suicide rate is higher for the elderly than for any other age group.
T F
3. Drinking alcohol while taking some sleeping pills, pain pills, or anxiety or depression medicine can be very dangerous, causing unconsciousness, coma, or even death.
T F
4. Breaking down alcohol is slower in women since their stomach enzymes are less active.
T F
5. Alcohol is a proven cause of cancer, second only to smoking.
T F
6. There is a greater risk of dying of stroke or heart attack if a person frequently drinks to excess.
T F
7. Heavy drinking does not cause weak bones (osteoporosis), which leads to fractures.
T F
8. Depression in the elderly is often misdiagnosed as dementia or Alzheimer's.
T F
9. Alcohol does not have a greater effect on women's driving skills.
T F
10. People with addiction to painkillers are older Americans, who are developing addiction through *medical* use.
T F

Name _____

Signature _____ Date _____