



alcohol & older adults

supporting health and wellness

As they age, older adults can consider:

- adhering strictly to low-risk maximums recommended for adults in general (if not drinking even less), so
- not more than two standard alcohol drinks per week
- at most two standard alcohol drinks on any occasion
- zero alcohol drinks when taking medication that interacts with alcohol
- checking with a doctor or a pharmacist before using alcohol when taking any medication

Many adults enjoy alcohol when socializing, relaxing, or celebrating. Seniors can continue to do so if they carefully monitor their use. It is important for seniors to understand how alcohol can affect their health as they age, and consider what 'low risk' alcohol use means for them.

Alcohol, health and medications

As we get older, our bodies process alcohol more slowly, and we become more sensitive to its effects. With advancing age, there is a tendency to lose lean body mass, resulting in less water in the body to dilute the alcohol. An age-related decline in the production of an enzyme which helps break down alcohol also places an extra burden on the liver - the major organ involved in processing alcohol.

Many health problems may worsen by consuming more than a safe amount of alcohol. These include high blood pressure, memory loss, depression, anxiety, diabetes, digestive problems, appetite loss, osteoporosis and stroke.

Drinking alcohol also distorts vision and hearing and reduces psychomotor skills. It affects alertness, judgment, memory and reaction times. Alcohol consumption also interferes with coordination, mobility and balance, and may result in an unexpected fall.

Almost half of all the prescription drugs taken by older people interact with alcohol. Drinking even small amounts of alcohol can either reduce or neutralize the effect of many over-the-counter drugs or prescribed medications. Some drugs can also intensify the sedative effects of alcohol, increasing drowsiness and reducing motor coordination.

Considering our alcohol use patterns as we age

Some older adults start using alcohol or increase the amount they consume later in life due to life altering events such as the loss of a friend, a pet, a job, their health, mobility, or the family home. Social isolation, boredom, and long stretches of leisure time can also trigger increased alcohol use.

It is important for older adults to understand that the health impacts of alcohol use change as they age. Older individuals should review [Canada's Guidance on Alcohol and Health](#), and carefully monitor their use to protect their health and wellbeing.

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