

DO YOU CARE FOR AN OLDER PERSON?

Don't kill them

WITH  
KINDNESS



**A FRIENDS AND FAMILIES GUIDE TO SAFE DRINKING FOR THE OVER 60'S**

# ALCOHOL AND OLDER PEOPLE

## A FRIENDS AND FAMILIES GUIDE TO SAFE DRINKING FOR THE OVER 60'S

17% of men and 7% of women aged over 65 drink above the recommended limits, this translates to half a million men and a quarter of a million women in England and Wales. The growing population trends indicate that these figures will rise in future years.

Alcohol misuse among older people is often misdiagnosed or missed altogether.

The effects of relatively small amounts of alcohol can be heightened when older people are taking prescription drugs and can make older people more vulnerable to accidents and other health problems.

Older problem drinkers are not just longer-lived versions of younger drinkers, they have particular problems they feel can be alleviated by alcohol.

## CAUSES AND EFFECTS

There are many factors and reasons for those who start drinking in later life. It may be to relieve pain, to help with sleep, to alleviate loneliness, boredom or bereavement, to replace meals or to keep warm.

Alcohol slows reactions, weakens judgement, balance and self control, among older people this adds to the risk of falls and accidents.

Drugs for rheumatism and arthritis, thrombosis, pain and general infection may also cause health problems when alcohol is consumed, while drugs for depression may cause psychological problems.

When misdiagnosis occurs, the consequences can be problematic e.g. alcoholic tremors can be taken for the onset of Parkinson's disease, the prescribed drugs for which mix badly with alcohol.

The stigma perceived by older people to be attached to problem drinking means the service needs to be 'taken to them'.



Is it *really*  
good for you?



Safe Drinking and Older People

For information pick up a leaflet, contact your local Drug Stop or ring  
Nursing Advisory Group on Alcohol (NAG) on 011 988 9888

## ACCIDENTS

Alcohol impairs co-ordination thus creating the risk of accidents. In people whose co-ordination is already poor the likelihood of accidents is that much greater.

## DEPRESSION

Alcohol is a depressant – it is not a stimulant. Drinking can cause or exacerbate a state of depression.

## HYPOTHERMIA

Contrary to popular myth, alcohol does not warm people up; it actually makes them colder.

## POOR NUTRITION

Alcohol is not a good source of nourishment. It contains calories but little else, it also reduces people's digestive powers.

## FINANCIAL PROBLEMS

Alcohol is expensive and may well be a drain on a small income.

## POOR RELATIONSHIPS

Alcohol can increase tension in relations and may lead to physical violence.



A nice drink  
always  
cheers  
me up

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## WHO IS DOING THE CARING?

All sorts of people may find themselves in the role of caring for an elderly person at home - either as a friend or relative, or in a professional capacity.

Home carers should have access to training to support them in identifying the physical and psychological symptoms of problem drinking. This will enable them to approach and deal sympathetically with elders to ensure that appropriate professional help is available and accessible.

For a care worker, showing that you understand why someone is drinking, and listening to them telling you about the role that alcohol plays in their life, can be very important in establishing a helping relationship.

Your role will involve some information giving, helping to clear up any misunderstandings about alcohol, about its effects and possible risks, so that individuals can make an informed choice about their drinking.

## WHY HOME CARERS?

- They are the front line staff providing practical help on a day to day basis.
- They monitor the general health and well-being of elders.
- They hold a trusting relationship with their clients/ relatives are often considered a friend.
- They are in a position to be the first point of contact and can tackle the subject of problem drinking sensitively.
- They can help their elder to get in touch with a local alcohol agency if needed.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

*Alcohol and Older People;*  
Mike Ward and Chris Goodman,  
*Not Born Yesterday;* Sheila Raby.  
*The Vintage Years: Older People and Alcohol;* Jeanne Wesson.

## ARE YOU INTERESTED IN FINDING OUT MORE?

A course on alcohol and older people for home carers can:

- Raise awareness about alcohol and drinking.
- Educate carers about alcohol and drinking in Haringey's multi-cultural community.
- Introduce harm-minimisation (problem solving) techniques to support positive change in alcohol use.
- Outline who else to involve (including line management and outside specialist and generic support for Local Authority workers).

## FURTHER INFORMATION:

The logo for HAGA (Haringey Advisory Group on Alcohol) features the letters 'HAGA' in a bold, black, sans-serif font. The letters are set against a background of red and white wavy lines that resemble a stylized flag or ribbon.

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