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Welcome to our information booklet about safe alcohol use for older persons. Many people use alcohol safely, in many social situations, however some people use alcohol to manage problems and difficulties. It is very effective at times but too much can cause more problems than you started with.

Many people wrongly assume that when we reach older age we do not have the ability to learn new skills nor retain new information.

Many information booklets are designed with young people in mind and do not address the specific questions and needs of the older person. We hope that some of these questions can be answered here!

If your drinking is decreasing your quality of life, leading to loss of dignity, or reducing independence, then it may be advisable to cut down or stop.

Q Lots of literature now states that a couple of drinks is good for you. Is this true?

A The Health Education Authority suggests that women can consume 2-3 units per day and men 3-4 units per day.

1 unit



half pint of beer

2 units



pub measure (25ml) overproof rum

1 unit



glass of sherry

4 units



can of strong/ super lager

It is alright to drink at these levels as long as you have checked the following with your family doctor or the surgery nurse:

- ▼ is it safe to drink any alcohol with the medication prescribed by your doctor?
- ▼ your physical health is generally alright and you have no other medical problems which may get worse if drinking alcohol e.g. high blood pressure, poor memory/forgetfulness.
- ▼ your emotional health is not a concern e.g. depression or low mood.

Problems with high blood pressure?

Alcohol raises your blood pressure. High blood pressure is very common as we get older. It also difficult for your G.P. to monitor and treat your high blood pressure if you drink too much alcohol.

Q Why target older people about their drinking?

A Older age is not a reason on it's own to stop drinking but it is important to know that as we get older our bodies can in fact tolerate less and there is a greater risk of harm.

Q Why then do older people sometimes drink too much?

A For a variety of reasons. Some people may drink:

- ▼ to manage pain
- ▼ to cope with bereavement
- ▼ to get to sleep
- ▼ to keep warm
- ▼ to combat loneliness



Q I've drunk alcohol every day for the last year or so and when I stop it makes me feel more unwell, why is that?

A Alcohol is physically addictive. When your body is denied alcohol you may experience withdrawal symptoms such as:

- ▼ sweating
- ▼ shaking
- ▼ agitation
- ▼ lack of or poor sleep
- ▼ vomiting
- ▼ nausea

Q My friends tell me a couple of glasses of stout is good for my blood. Is this true?

A No. To get the daily amount of iron your body needs from stout you would need to drink about 35 pints a day, which is definitely bad for your health! However if your Doctor says it's OK to drink at the safe levels then a glass of stout won't harm you either.

Q When is it not OK for me to drink?

A Alcohol is a sedative drug – when combined with other medicines it can change how they work.



Problems keeping Warm?

Alcohol does not warm you up. It increases the flow of blood to the skin which is why you have a warm glow after drinking. It actually makes you lose heat more rapidly.

Effects of too much alcohol

One thing we know is that as we age our bodies have less tolerance to alcohol. Many people find that they cannot drink the same amounts as when they were younger.

Drinking alcohol at harmful levels can affect our lives in many ways:

Effects on your body:

- ▼ liver damage
- ▼ blurred vision
- ▼ malnutrition
- ▼ incontinence
- ▼ high blood pressure
- ▼ diabetes
- ▼ increased number of falls due to loss of balance
- ▼ unable to sleep or disturbed sleep

Problems with low mood?

Alcohol can make you more depressed and if used with prescribed medication can cause over sedation and increased risk of accidents.

Effects on your mind and feelings:

- ▼ low mood, tearfulness
- ▼ anxiety
- ▼ memory loss
- ▼ confusion
- ▼ hallucinations (seeing or hearing things that others cannot)

Effects on your relationships with others:

- ▼ isolation
- ▼ arguments
- ▼ debts and poverty
- ▼ loss of home
- ▼ violence and aggression either to others or from others
- ▼ self neglect (not washing or caring for self)

Problems with sleeping?

Alcohol is not an effective cure for poor or little sleep, it can in fact cause it. It can help us to get to sleep but the sleep will not be restful.



Where can I find out more?

Having read all the information in this booklet we hope that we haven't scared you too much.

What we hope we have achieved is that you are asking yourself questions about your alcohol use.

If you drink every day it is very important you seek professional advice before stopping. Please make an appointment to see your doctor.

If you have a Social Worker or Home Carer talk to them and voice any concerns you have. They will support you in any help you may need.



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