

# Caregiver Assistance News

*"Caring for You - Caring for Others"*

**Area Agency on Aging District 7, Inc.**

*Serving Adams, Brown, Gallia, Highland, Jackson, Lawrence,  
Pike, Ross, Scioto and Vinton Counties in Ohio*

**www.aaa7.org** **Helping You Age Better!**



**MAY 2017**

## **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. Older adults 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 percent of the over age 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), they are 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.

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- 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](http://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 them 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.



## **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.



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

*- Walter Winchell -*

# 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 them.

- 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.

## Community Wellness Classes

**Chronic Disease Self-Management • Diabetes Self-Management  
A Matter of Balance Falls Prevention • Diabetes Empowerment**

Contact us to learn more about these FREE classes!

**1-800-582-7277 or  
info@aaa7.org**

### Chronic Disease Self-Management

**Brown County** - July 7th - August 11th in  
Georgetown

**Gallia County** - June 1st - July 13th in  
Gallipolis

**Scioto County** - June 7th - July 12th in  
Portsmouth

### Diabetes Empowerment Education Program

**Jackson County** - August 31st - October 12th  
in Jackson

### Diabetes Self-Management

**Brown County** - August 25th -  
September 29th in  
Georgetown

**Lawrence County** - July 20th -  
August 24th in Ironton



### Matter of Balance Falls Management

**Jackson County** - August 2nd - September 20th  
in Jackson

*Check out our website at [www.aaa7.org](http://www.aaa7.org) to keep up-to-date on calendar changes and additions!*



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## **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).

