

Alcohol and Older Australians

Alcohol is one of the most commonly used drugs in Australia. There are many reasons why people choose to drink alcohol. These include: to be sociable, to relax, to celebrate, and for enjoyment. Some people might drink when they feel sad, lonely, bored, isolated, in pain or to cope with problems. While Australians aged 60 years and older drink for similar reasons to younger people, their age does make them more vulnerable to the effects of alcohol.

Did you know?

- Because of physical changes that occur with ageing alcohol use has a greater impact on older people. In other words, older people may feel intoxicated or 'tipsy' even after a small amount of alcohol. This means that even a small amount of alcohol can increase the risk of accidents, including falls and fractures and car crashes.
- As you get older there is a greater risk of harm to your health from drinking alcohol. Drinking too much, even on one-off occasions, can cause problems for you at home, with your friends or with the law. You might also put other people at risk (e.g. if you are driving when intoxicated).
- The same amount of alcohol consumed by men and women results in a higher blood alcohol concentration in women. This is largely due to differences in body size (women are generally smaller), proportions of body fat and differences in the way women's bodies metabolise alcohol.
- As you age, you may be prescribed a variety of medications. Many prescription medicines, over-the-counter, or herbal remedies—can be dangerous when mixed with alcohol, so always check with your doctor or pharmacist first, whenever you take new medicines or your mix of medicines change.



Are there health benefits from alcohol?

- The World Health Organization has concluded that research does not support encouraging drinking as a way to reduce the risk of disease and that alcohol cannot be recommended as a preventive medicine. The Cancer Council of Australia has stated that drinking any alcohol increases the risks of cancer.

Drinking is not recommended if you:

- Have a condition made worse by drinking (e.g. high blood pressure)
- Are about to engage in activities requiring a degree of skill or risk (e.g. driving)
- Are on any medication, in which case it is recommended that you speak with your doctor or pharmacist before drinking alcohol.

Drinking too much alcohol over a long time can:

- Lead to different kinds of cancer, liver damage, immune system disorders, and brain damage.
- Worsen some health conditions like osteoporosis, diabetes, high blood pressure, and ulcers.
- Mask pain and make some medical problems hard for doctors to find and treat—for example, alcohol can cause changes in the heart and blood vessels.
- Cause you to be forgetful and confused—these symptoms could be mistaken for signs of Alzheimer's disease.
- Make problems like depression and anxiety worse.
- Result in poor quality sleep—you might fall asleep faster but the sleep you have will not be as restful.



So the message is: If you don't drink, don't start! If you do choose to drink alcohol then have a chat with your doctor or pharmacist about what is best for you.

If you would like more information about alcohol and/or other drugs contact the **Alcohol and Drug Support Line** on **9442 5000** or toll-free (country callers) **1800 198 024**.

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