

Elder Abuse & Neglect – Alcohol Issues

Most seniors never report abuse because they're too scared or too ashamed, especially when the abuser is a family member or caregiver. The **National Center on Elder Abuse** estimates that only a small fraction of cases are reported. If abuse happens to someone in your care, contact your local law enforcement agency to make a report. They will decide what steps to take.

Neglect is defined as providing inadequate food, water, clothing, shelter or help with personal hygiene and health care. (When medically and legally sanctioned, the withholding of nutrition and hydration at the end of life or when a person is in hospice care is *not* defined as neglect.)

People with dementia are especially vulnerable to mistreatment. Understanding dementia, knowing how best to communicate with a person with dementia, and having adequate support for yourself can go a long way toward preventing these very upsetting situations.

Signs of Elder Abuse

Knowing the signs and symptoms of abuse can help you determine if there is a problem. Signs and symptoms may include—

- ☑ **Physical injury**—bruises, cuts, burns or rope marks, broken bones or sprains that can't be explained.



- ☑ **Emotional abuse**—feelings of helplessness, a hesitation to talk openly, fear, withdrawal, depression, or agitation.
- ☑ **Lack of physical care**—malnourishment, poor hygiene, bedsores, soiled bedding, unmet medical needs.
- ☑ **Unusual behaviors**—changes in the person's behavior or emotional state, such as withdrawal, fear, anxiety or apathy.
- ☑ **Changes in living arrangements** without notifying anyone.
- ☑ **Unexplained changes** such as the appearance of previously uninvolved relatives or newly met strangers moving in.
- ☑ **Financial changes**—missing money or valuables, unexplained financial transactions, unpaid bills despite available funds, and sudden transfer of assets.

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Alcohol Issues

Caregivers can be especially vulnerable to problems involving alcohol in two ways. They themselves can drink or take prescription drugs to ease the stress and pain of working overtime to care for a loved one or client. Second, caregivers are naturals at taking care of someone else, and can find themselves involved with a person who has alcohol dependence and needs someone to care for him or her.



Alcoholism is a disease that includes the following four symptoms:

- **Craving**—A strong need, or urge, to drink.
- **Loss of control**—Not being able to stop drinking once drinking has begun.
- **Physical dependence**—Withdrawal symptoms, such as nausea, sweating, shakiness, and anxiety after stopping drinking.
- **Tolerance**—The need to drink greater amounts of alcohol to get “high.”

What is a safe level of drinking?

For most adults, moderate alcohol use is up to two drinks per day for men and one drink per day for women and older people. (One drink equals one 12-ounce bottle of beer or wine cooler, one 5-ounce glass of wine, or 1.5 ounces of 80-proof distilled spirits.) The beer or two you could drink without consequence in your 30s or 40s has more impact in your 60s or 70s.

Certain people should not drink at all, however:

- Women who are pregnant or trying to become pregnant
- People who plan to drive or engage in other activities that require alertness and skill (such as using high-speed machinery)
- People taking certain over-the-counter or prescription medications
- People with medical conditions that can be made worse by drinking
- Recovering alcoholics
- People younger than age 21.

There are many national and local resources that can help. The National Drug and Alcohol Treatment Referral Routing Service provides a hotline, 800-662-HELP, offering various resource information. Through this service you can speak directly to a representative concerning substance abuse treatment, request printed material on alcohol or other drugs, or obtain substance abuse treatment referral information in your State.

Taking Care of Yourself— Dealing with Critical People

We are wired to go immediately into defensive mode when criticized. People criticize us for the same reason we criticize them. They may feel badly about themselves and reflexively get judgmental or lash out. Take time to genuinely consider the other person's point of view. We can learn to listen differently, to ask questions, to apologize for the part we play and define how we see things differently.

Tips to help you defuse a fight when an angry person approaches you:

1. **Recognize your defensiveness.** Catch yourself when you are focusing on the inaccuracies and exaggerations.
2. **Breathe.** Calm yourself with slow, deep breaths.
3. **Listen only to understand.** Do not interrupt, correct facts, or bring up your own criticisms.
4. **Apologize for your part.** It will help shift the exchange out of combat into collaboration. Save your thoughts about their part until later.
5. **Let the offended party know he or she has been heard and that you will continue to think about the conversation.**
6. **Draw the line at insults.** Exit from rudeness while offering the possibility of discussing the issue again.

Source: *Why Won't You Apologize?: Healing Big Betrayals and Everyday Hurts* by Harriet Lerner PhD



Live Life Laughing!

Before you judge the younger generation remember who raised them.



Inspiration

When you inherit a broken family, you can't throw it away and get a new one. What you can do is find people and situations that provide for you what your family cannot.

~ Iyanla Vanzant

Memory Care

Individuals with moderate dementia may not remember how much they drank and may inadvertently partake in heavy drinking without even realizing it.

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SAFETY TIPS—Mixing Drugs and Alcohol

Alcohol-drug interactions are dangerous. Because alcohol and many medications are processed by the liver, this can enhance the effects of alcohol or the medications. Some examples are:

- ★ Heartburn drugs like Zantac interfere with the metabolism of alcohol and raise blood-alcohol levels.
- ★ Acetaminophen (Tylenol), when combined with alcohol, can damage the liver.
- ★ Mixing alcohol with blood thinners like Coumadin can cause dangerous bleeding.
- ★ Taking alcohol with some pain medications and anti-anxiety drugs can make a person overly sleepy, more likely to have heart problems, and, most important, more likely to overdose.
- ★ Long-term alcohol use can raise blood pressure.
- ★ Alcohol tends to irritate the stomach.

If you're not sure if a medication can be combined with alcohol, avoid any alcohol consumption until your doctor or pharmacist has told you that it's safe to mix the two.

Source: CDC; National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism