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E4 Center of Excellence for Behavioral Health  
Disparities in Aging, in conjunction with the Illinois  
Department on Aging

Present a Home and Community-Based Quality and  
Risk Mitigation Webinar

*Holiday Drinking: Helping Older Adults be Happier  
and Safer*

## Mission

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The mission of the E4 Center is to engage, empower, and educate health care providers and community-based organizations for equity in behavioral health for older adults and their families. E4 will achieve this through the provision of education, implementation resources, and technical assistance regarding mental health, substance use, and their intersection with physical health.

**Please visit [e4center.org](https://e4center.org) to learn more!**



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# University of Michigan Addiction Center

## *Holiday Drinking: Helping Older Adults be Happier and Safer*

*E4 Center, Rush University  
Illinois Department on Aging Quality Webinar  
December 8, 2020*

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# Disclosure

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# Presentation Overview

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- Older Adults & Alcohol Use: Extent of the Problem
- The Holidays & Unique Impact on Older Adults who Drink
- Solutions & Ways to Cope





# More Americans Are Binge Drinking During Pandemic: How to Cope Without Alcohol

**The Telegraph**

By Charles Hymas, HOME AFFAIRS EDITOR

18 November 2020 • 6:00am

**A fifth of over 50s put health at risk by binge drinking at least once a week in lockdown, study reveals**



*Posted at 7:20 PM, Nov 23, 2020 and last updated 7:30 PM, Nov 23, 2020*

## Addiction experts warn of relapses, binge drinking during holidays



August 13, 2020 · 4:10 PM ET  
Heard on [All Things Considered](#)

# U.S. Sees Deadly Drug Overdose Spike During Pandemic

COVID-19 pandemic brings new concerns about excessive drinking

[News](#) > [Medscape Medical News](#)

## COVID-19 Shutdown Fuels Sharp Rise in Alcohol Use

Megan Brooks

September 29, 2020

[MISSING LINK](#)

When We Talk About Suicide, We Need to Talk About Addiction

JAMIE BRICKHOUSE06.16.18 9:34 PM ET

THE DAILY BEAST



# Extent of the Problem

## Older Adults & Alcohol Use



# 73 million 'Baby Boomers'

## Born from: 1946-1964, Now Age: 56-74



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: THURSDAY, JUNE 25, 2020



# 65 and Older Population Grows Rapidly as Baby Boomers Age

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- Since 2010, rapid increase in the size of the 65+ population, growing by over 1/3.
- No other age group saw such a rapid increase.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau: Newsroom. [Press Release](#). June 25, 2020.

# Substance Abuse & Older Adults

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In 2018, nearly 1 million adults aged 65 and older were living with a substance use disorder (SUD)

#1 - **Alcohol** (~2-18%)

#2 - Nicotine (~9%)

#3 - Psychoactive Prescription Drugs (~6%)

#4 - Other Illegal Drugs (<1%), cannabis, cocaine, narcotics

# National rates of drinking, heavy drinking, and AUD in U.S. adults are **increasing**

Research

JAMA Psychiatry | [Original Investigation](#)

## Increases in 12-Month Alcohol Use, High-Risk Drinking, and *DSM-IV* Alcohol Use Disorder in the United States, 2001-2002 to 2012-2013

Bridget F. Grant, PhD; S. Patricia Chou, PhD; Tulshi D. Saha, PhD; Roger P. Pickering, MS; Bradley T. Kerridge, PhD; W. June Ruan, MS; Boji Huang, MD, PhD; Jeusun Jung, PhD; Haitao Zhang, PhD; Amy Fan, PhD; Deborah S. Hasin, PhD



# Alcohol use among **older adults** is increasing, including past-month binge alcohol use & AUD, with increasing trends among **females**



ELSEVIER

## Drug and Alcohol Dependence

Volume 170, 1 January 2017, Pages 198-207



Full length article

## Demographic trends of binge alcohol use and alcohol use disorders among older adults in the United States, 2005–2014

Benjamin H. Han <sup>a, b</sup>, Alison A. Moore <sup>c</sup>, Scott Sherman <sup>a, d</sup>, Katherine M. Keyes <sup>e</sup>, Joseph J. Palamar <sup>b, d</sup>

# Older adults are more vulnerable to adverse alcohol effects

## **Age-related changes in alcohol absorption and metabolism**

- Higher BAC & more impairment from a given dose Alcohol-Medication Interactions

## **Alcohol + Medication = Dangerous Interactions**

- Frequent use of multiple medications for chronic conditions, including mental health conditions.

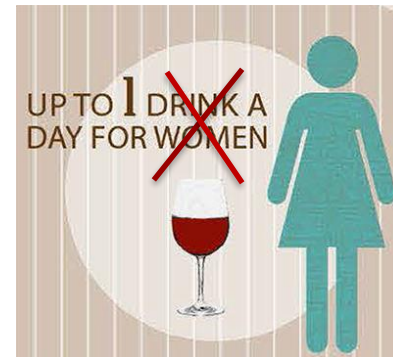
## **More Prone to Falls, Injuries, Confusion from Alcohol**

- Functional and cognitive impairment worsens with alcohol & medication.



# Different Recommended Drinking Limits for Older Adults

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Older Men: **No more** than 1 drink per day

Older Women: **Less than** 1 drink per day

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2006

# Recommended Drinking Limits for Older Adults

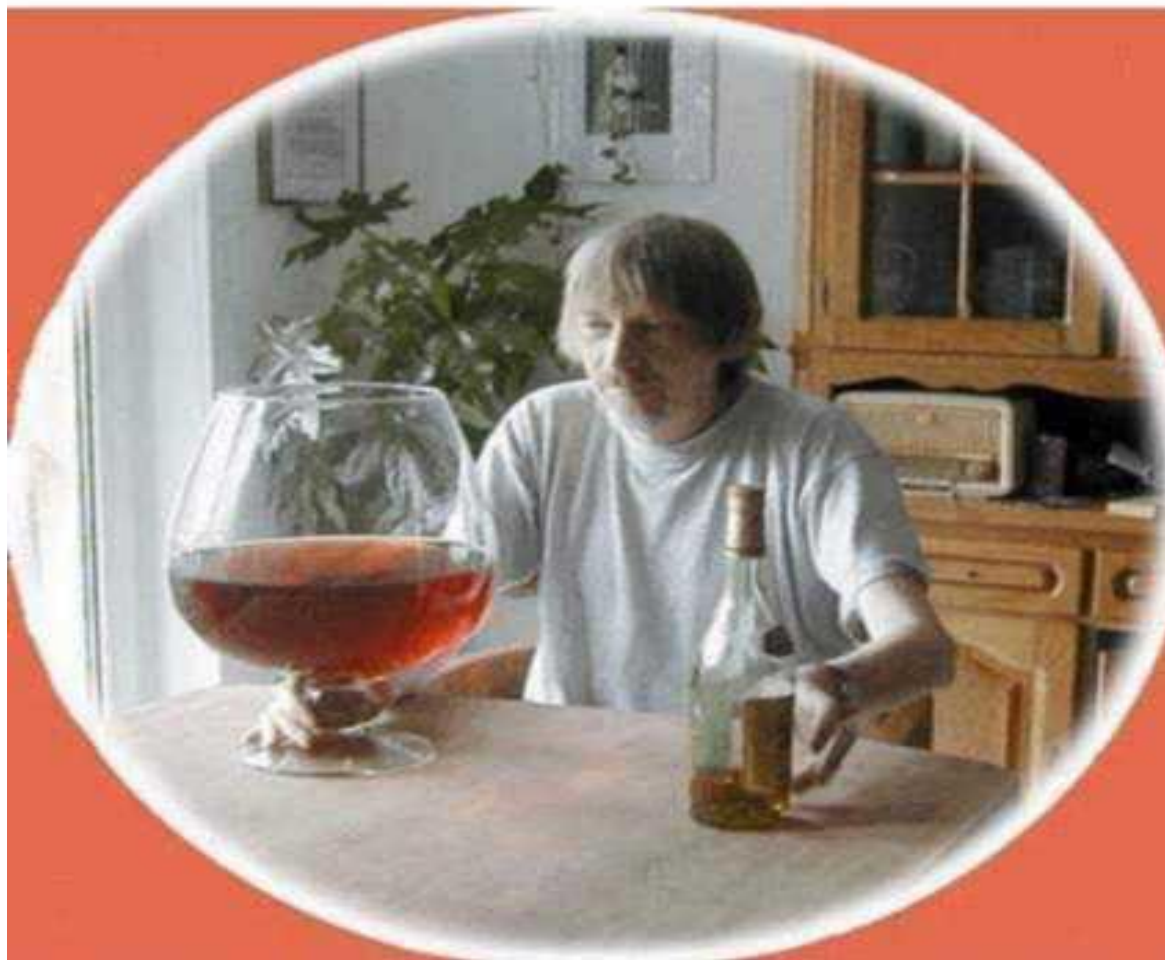
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**Older Adult Binge Drinking:**  
drinking four or more drinks  
during a single occasion  
(drinking day) for men or three  
or more drinks during a single  
occasion for women.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2006

My Doctor said "Only 1 glass of alcohol a day". I can live with that.



# WHAT IS CONSIDERED A "DRINK"?

## U.S. STANDARD DRINK SIZES



**12** OUNCES  
OF 5% ABV  
BEER



**8** OUNCES  
OF 7% ABV  
MALT LIQUOR



**5** OUNCES  
OF 12% ABV  
WINE



**1.5** OUNCES  
OF 40% ABV  
(80-PROOF)  
DISTILLED SPIRITS  
OR LIQUOR  
(Examples: gin, rum,  
vodka, whiskey)

# What's the Harm in a Few Drinks?

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Epidemiologic data suggests moderate drinking can be beneficial for:

- Heart disease
- Possibly preventing neurocognitive disorders
- Low/moderate daily alcohol use most beneficial
- Social aspects



## Potential confounds

- Sample selection (fit elders with healthy lifestyles)
- Surrogate for something else (nutrition, exercise)
- No clinical trials data





# Alcohol Use Risks

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1 or more drinks per day

- Gastritis, ulcers, liver and pancreas problems

2 or more drinks per day

- Depression, gout, GERD, breast cancer, insomnia, memory problems, falls

3 or more drinks per day

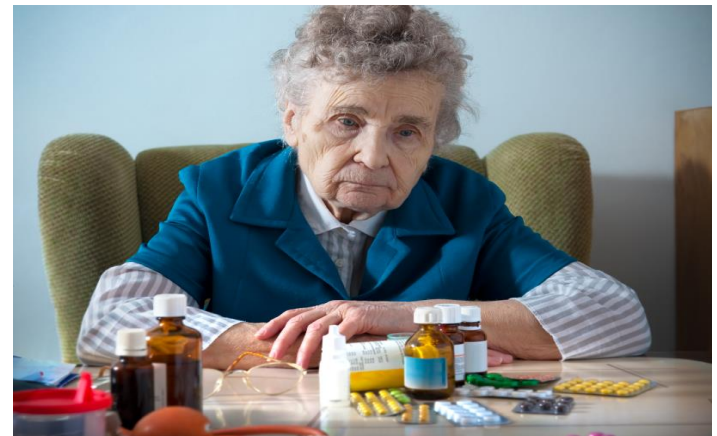
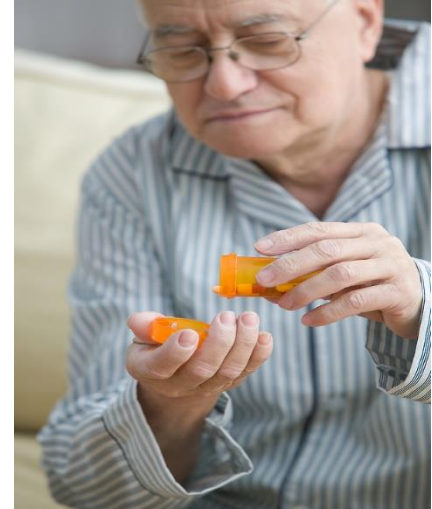
- Hypertension, stroke, diabetes, gastrointestinal diseases, cancer of many varieties



# Common Medications Interact with Alcohol

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- Benzodiazepines
- Opiate/Opioid Analgesics
- Other sedatives
- Some anticonvulsants
- Some psychotropics
- Some antidepressants
- Some barbiturates





# Alcohol Use and Suicide

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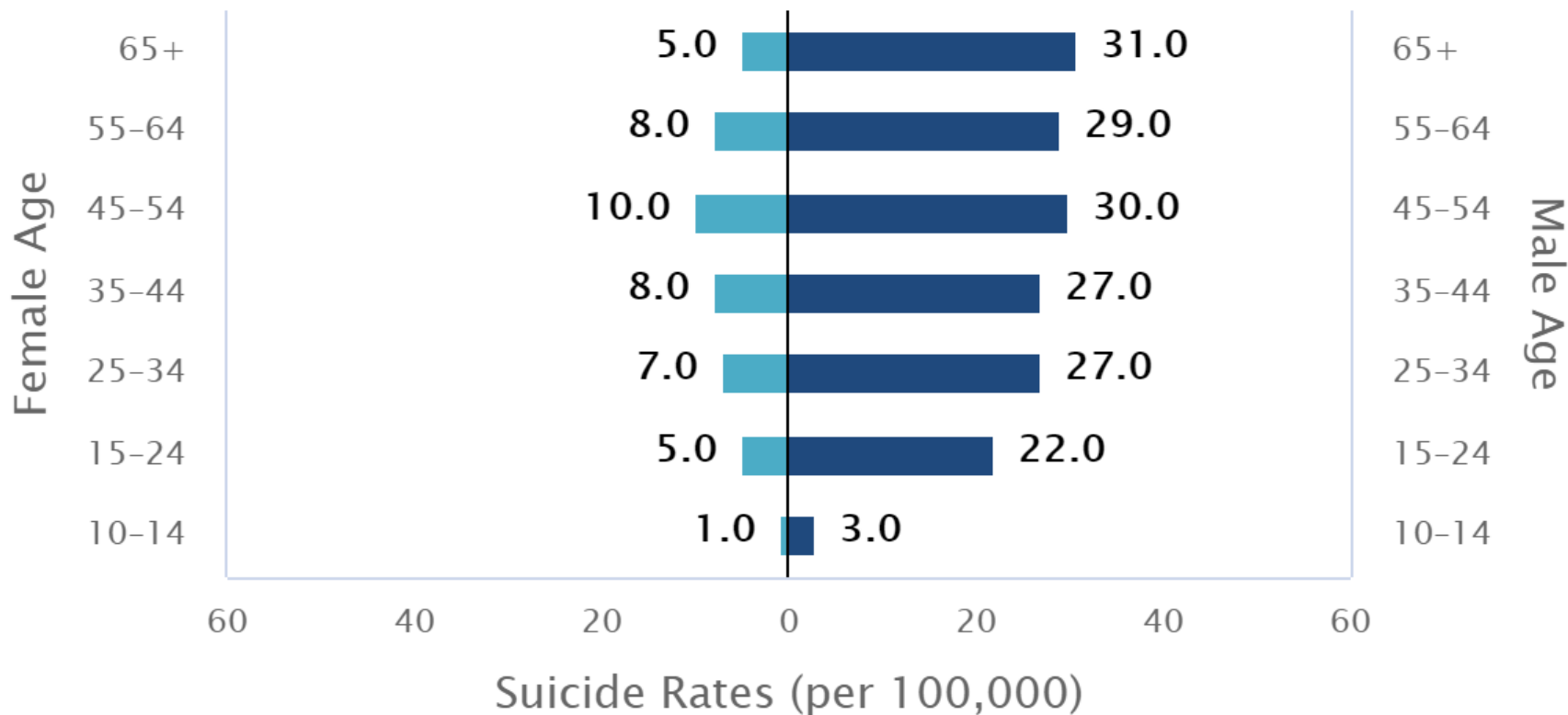
Highest rates of completed suicides:

Older white males who are depressed, drinking heavily, and who have recently lost their partner



People with alcohol dependence should be screened for psychiatric symptoms & for suicidality

# 2017 U.S. Suicide Rates by Age (per 100,000)



Source: CDC:

<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/suicide.shtml>

● Female ● Male

# Suicide Rates in Older Adults

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- 65+: highest suicide rate of any age group
- 85+: 2X the national average (CDC 1999)
- Men>Women; Whites>African Americans
- Peak suicide rates:
  - Suicide rate goes up continuously for men
  - Peaks at midlife for women, then declines
- 20% older men saw PCP on day of suicide
- 40% older men saw PCP on week of suicide
- 70% older men saw PCP on month of suicide

# Risk Factors for Suicide in Older Adults

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- Psychiatric illness (particularly depression, major depression)
  - Present in 71-97% of suicides
- **Substance use disorders**
- Physical Health and Functional Impairment
  - \*as the number of an individual's acute and chronic conditions increases, so does their cumulative risk\*
- Chronic pain
- Cognitive deficits in later life
- **Stressful life events (family discord, losses)**
- **Low social connectedness or isolation**
- Personality inflexibility, rigid coping
- Access to lethal means

## COVID-19 AND OLDER PERSONS

### Economic well-being

The pandemic may significantly lower older persons' incomes and living standards. Already, less than 20% of older persons of retirement age receiving a pension

### Life and Death

Fatality rates are five times higher than global average. An estimated 66% of people aged 70 and over have at least one underlying health condition

### Mental health

Physical distancing can take a heavy toll on our mental health. Living alone and being more digitally included than others, the risks are higher for older persons

### Vulnerability

Essential care that older persons often rely on is under pressure. Almost half of COVID-19 deaths in Europe occurred in long term care settings. Older women often provide care for older relatives increasing their risk to infection

### Responders

Older persons are not just victims. They are also responding. They are health workers, carers and among many essential service providers

### Abuse and neglect

In 2017, 1 in 6 older persons were subjected to abuse. With lockdowns and reduced care, violence against older persons is on the rise



Source: <https://www.unece.org/info/media/news/population/2020/the-impact-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-on-older-persons/doc.html>

**8** out of **10** COVID-19 deaths reported in the U.S. have been in adults 65 years old and older.

**Grief, stress, anxiety, physical isolation, etc.**

**= increase in alcohol use**

**= new & worsening addiction, relapse, deaths**





# Social Isolation & Loneliness in Older Adults

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- High Blood Pressure
- Heart disease
- Cognitive Decline
- **Addiction**
- Weakened Immune System
- Alzheimer's disease
- Obesity
- **Anxiety**
- **Depression**
- **Suicide**



Source: NIH. National Institute on Aging. 23 April 2019. [Social isolation, loneliness in older people pose health risks.](#)





**LOCKDOWN**



**DRINKING**

**NEW TONIGHT**

**CORONAVIRUS**

**SPIKE IN ALCOHOL SALES DURING COVID-19 OUTBREAK**

**5**

# Alcohol and COVID-19

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**Alcohol weakens immune system.** It increases risk of complications, and makes it harder to recover from illness.

**Alcohol increases risk** of lung-related diseases such as respiratory distress syndrome and pneumonia, both are associated with COVID-19



# COVID-19 and Addiction Risks

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- The stress from physical isolation and other COVID-19 related life changes can lead to or worsen substance use and misuse.
- Chronic alcohol/drug use weakens the immune system and puts stress on the body's cardiovascular and respiratory systems.



# 2020 Holidays

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- Usual holiday demands worsened by stress & anxiety related to COVID-19 and physical isolation
- Loss of routine and tradition
- Many older adults will spend the holidays alone, for the first time
- For those in recovery, this is the perfect storm for more drinking & relapse





# Helping a Loved One who Drinks Cope with the Holidays

- *Ask them* how you can make their holiday better. What do they need?
- Never encourage/enable their alcohol use, *even on the holidays*.
- Manage false expectations. The holidays are hard, *don't expect them to pretend to feel happy*.
- *Pay attention* for signs/symptoms of withdraw, depression, anxiety.
- Encourage them to participate in mutual help groups, *help* them attend.
- Ask them if they are comfortable taking part in celebrations this year. If not, *it's okay*.



# SBIRT

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- Screening
- Brief Intervention
- Referral to Treatment

# The Holidays & Grief

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- The holidays often bring up feelings of grief of a spouse or loved one and memories of previous holidays.
- Grief has no set timeframe.
- Older adults may experience multiple losses, especially during current times.





# Grief Support

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- Provide safe space for them to explore their feelings
- Help them remember their loved one
- Offer information about the grief process
- Help them integrate the loss
- Prolonged or complicated grief that interferes with daily functioning or suicidal ideation, refer for psychiatric evaluation and/or trained grief counselor



# Solutions

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- Seek out healthy activities
- Make alternative holiday plans or adjust traditional plans
- Find alternative ways to stay connected to loved ones

\*Practice using technology prior to scheduled virtual family gatherings\*



# 10 Ways to Help Older Adults this Holiday Season



**Check on them frequently**, preferably by phone given the risk of transmission.



**If you visit them**, maintain a distance of at least 1 meter and avoid physical contact (handshakes, hugs).



**Buy groceries, supplies and medicines** for them.



**Make sure they have at least a month's stock of all their regular medicines** in case they need to stay home.



**Be kind and show empathy. Talk and listen to them. Help them cope with stress.** Once the pandemic is over, you will hug again!



If your loved one is in a home for the elderly, **avoid visits. Use phone, video chat or email to keep in touch.**



Make a plan in case they fall ill **and decide how transportation will be arranged to seek health care.**



**Encourage them to maintain a healthy lifestyle:** eat nutritious foods, get enough sleep, don't smoke, stay active and limit alcohol use.



**Help them connect with doctors**, neighbors, friends and family if needed.



Remind them to wash their hands frequently, keep objects and surfaces clean, and **avoid physical contact with those who are sick.**

**Source:** WHO Infographic. 7 Apr 2020. COVID-19. Ways to help the elderly and/or people with underlying conditions living alone. Download [here](#).

# Advice for Older Adults

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- Contact primary care provider
- Locate virtual treatment & recovery programs
  - [SAMHSA treatment locator](#)
  - [SAMHSA virtual recovery resource list](#)
  - [SAMHSA National Helpline: 1-800-663-HELP \(4357\)](#)
- Explore medication treatment for alcohol problems
- Take all meds as prescribed, continue therapy and support appointments via telehealth

# Support for Caregivers

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Stress, responsibility and lack of support can cause caregivers to develop unhealthy behaviors. Providers can help by:

- **Involve caregivers** (treatment decisions, recovery planning)
- Screen, assess and refer caregivers for SUD and MH issues. Encourage they get an **annual physical**.
- Support their use of **self-care activities**: exercise, healthy eating, enough sleep, **reduce or avoid alcohol use**.
- Encourage them to **ask for help** (family, friends, community members social service agency)
- Remind them to **take breaks** from the caregiver role
- Encourage them to **join mutual help groups** ([Al-Anon](#), [caregiver support groups](#))
- Remind them that their relationship with their loved one has **meaning and can still give them satisfaction**.





# Holiday Relapse Triggers

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Tense relationships with family members = stress



The holidays can trigger feelings of grief & loneliness



The presence of alcohol at family gatherings = temptation to drink





# Recovery Support During the Holidays

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**Frequent contact** between older adults and family members via online communication applications **decreases** loneliness and **increases** social contact for older adults.



# Engage family members/caregivers in recovery support

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- Involve them in the older adults' treatment (with consent)
- Emphasize the importance of emotional and instrumental support (i.e. providing rides to appointments, helping fill medications, etc.)
- Share specific, skillful ways to provide support
- Instruct them to visit the older adult when he or she is not misusing substances, rather than visiting only during times of crisis
- Recommend they attend family support groups such as Al-Anon



# SAMHSA Wellness Wheel for Recovery

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Explore all 8 dimensions of wellness as a way to help older adults sustain recovery

Help clients set goals in each dimension

\*\*\*SAMHSA TIP 26 includes examples of wellness activities in each domain

Source: SAMHSA, TIP 26, 2020



Brief article

## Gratitude, abstinence, and alcohol use disorders: Report of a preliminary finding

Amy R. Krentzman 

Journaling shows how **subjective wellbeing** during recovery from addiction leads to **ongoing, sustained recovery** from addiction.



# Dry January & Sober October

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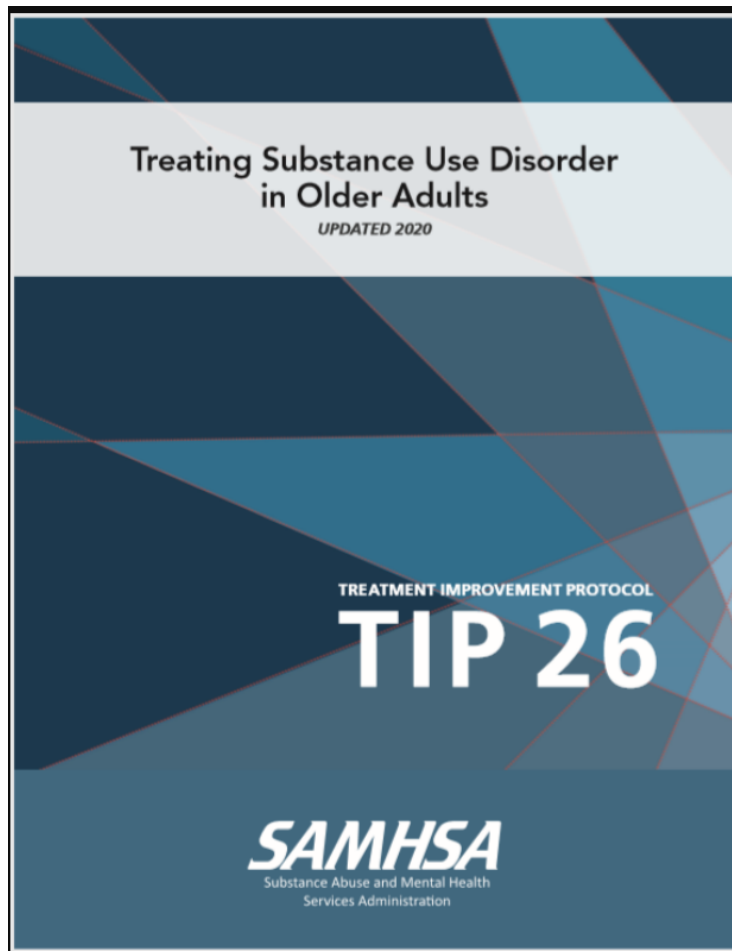


\*Alcohol withdrawal can be fatal, this should not be suggested for individuals with very high alcohol consumption or AUD\*



# September 2020: Updated Treatment Guide for Older Adults

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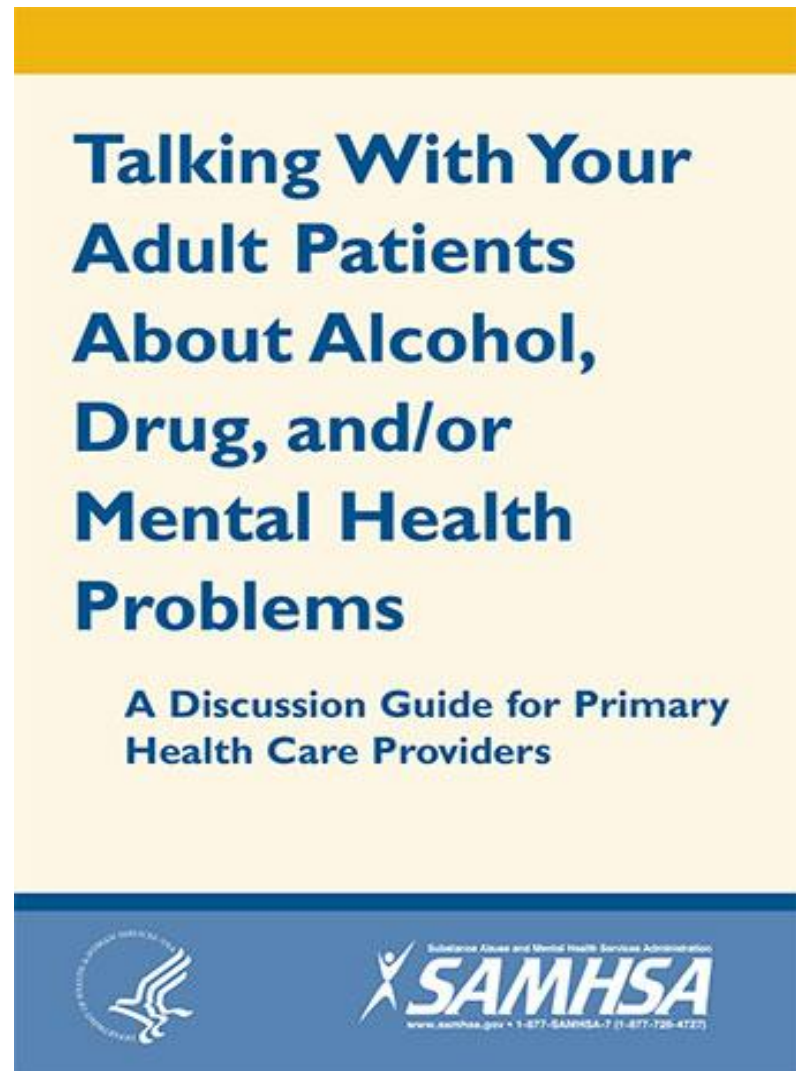
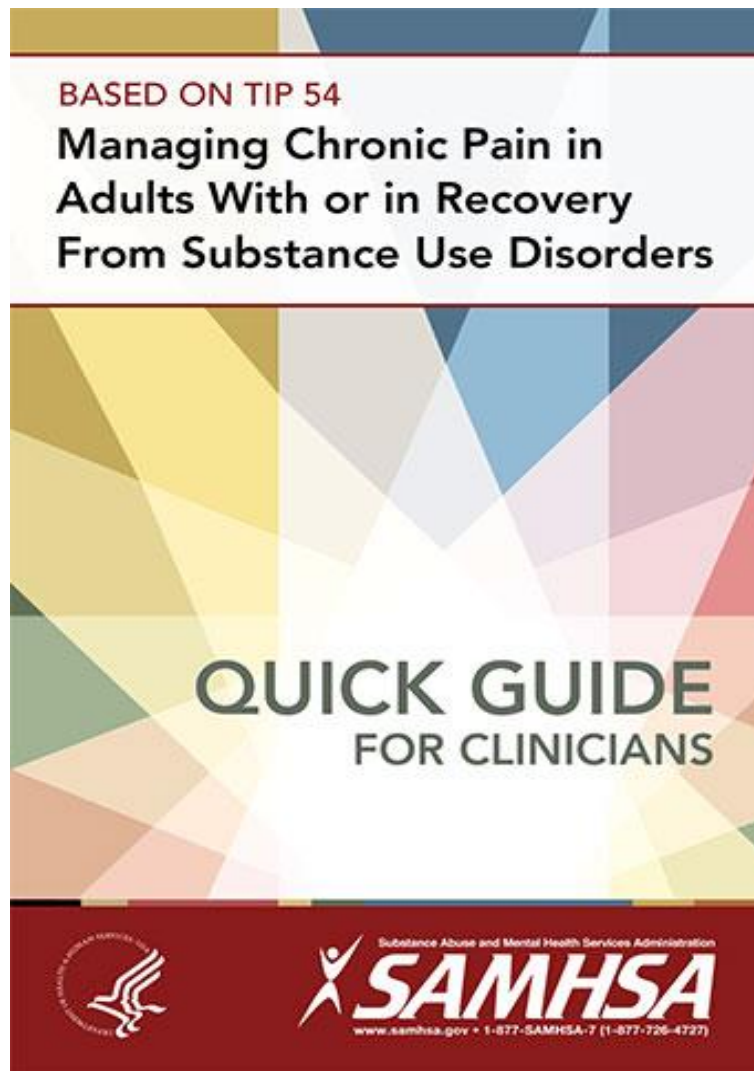


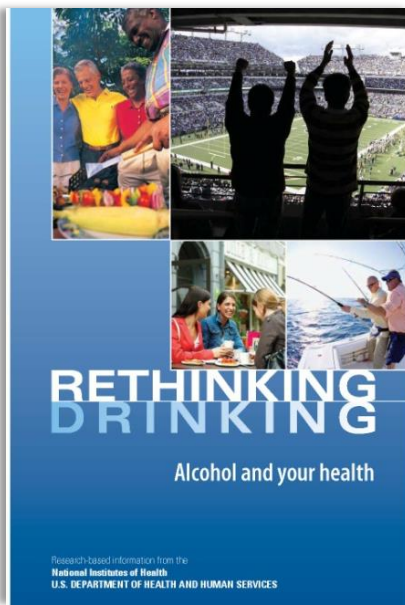
- For providers, stakeholders, individuals and families.
- Guide to help identify, manage, and prevent substance misuse in older adults.
- Age-appropriate screening tools & assessments
- Treatments tailored for older adults
- SUDs & cognitive impairment in older adults
- Strategies for provider to improve older adult social functioning & wellness.

\*\*\*available for download at [SAMHSA.gov](https://www.samhsa.gov)



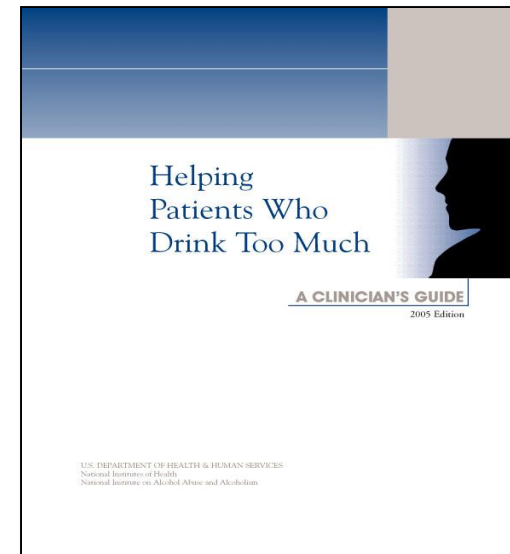
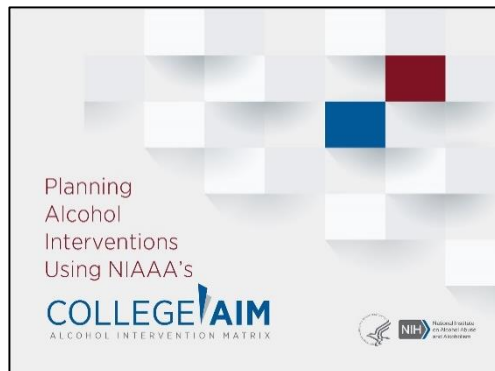
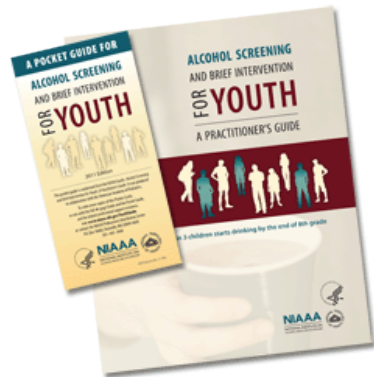
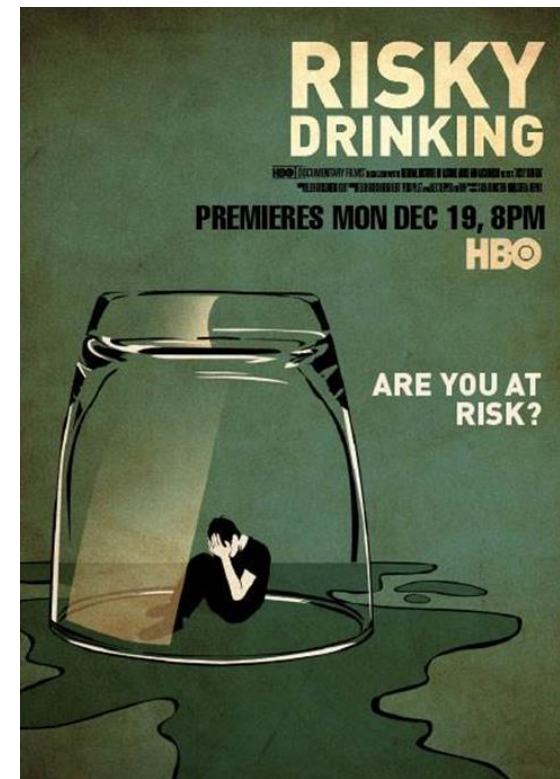
# Resources





# NIAAA

## www.niaaa.nih.gov



# Take-Home Messages

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- Older adults are especially vulnerable this year during the holidays.
- Harmful drinking may increase so early identification & intervention is crucial.
- Relapse prevention is essential.
- For those with serious problems/addiction: **TREATMENT WORKS!**

# Contact Information

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# Evaluation and Continuing Education

- Please complete the evaluation here:  
<https://gpra.us/P?s=553847>
- After completing the survey, you will be directed to the Continuing Education webpage (rushu.rush.edu/checkin)
  - Activity Code: 481127