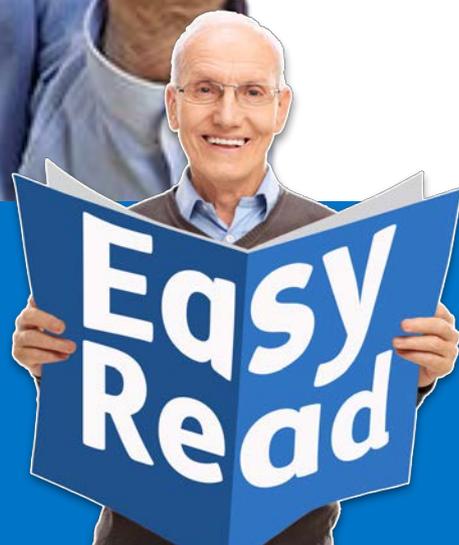


Alcohol and other drug addiction



MindEd
for Families

online advice and support you can trust

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Substance misuse



Substance misuse is where someone is taking a drug in a way that harms their body or mind.

It could be:

- Drinking too much alcohol
- Taking illegal drugs
- Taking medication that they should not have



More older people are taking drugs that are harmful.



Substance misuse affects your:

- Mental and physical health
- Your independence and relationships



What is a substance?



Substances are types of drug that changes the way someone feels, thinks and behaves.



People take substances for pleasure. They may make you feel more relaxed, more confident or more sociable.



Such feelings can lead to:

- Behaving differently
- Making decisions that are risky



Risky decisions can affect everyday activities such as driving or signing legal documents.



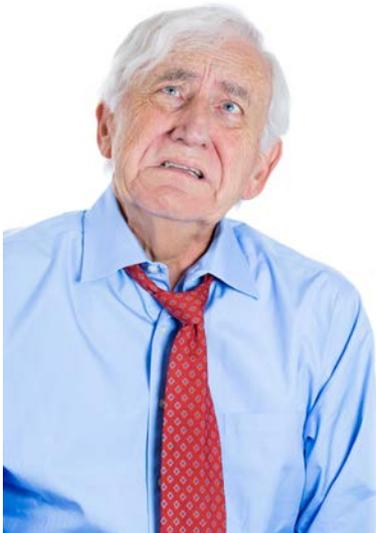
Taking substances can lead to addiction and harm.

Addiction



Addiction is where your life centres around taking and recovering from the effects of taking a substance.

It is difficult to stop yourself from taking more.



People who have addiction often:

- Don't feel confident
- Don't feel good about themselves
- Don't feel as if they are in control of their lives
- Don't admit that they have a problem



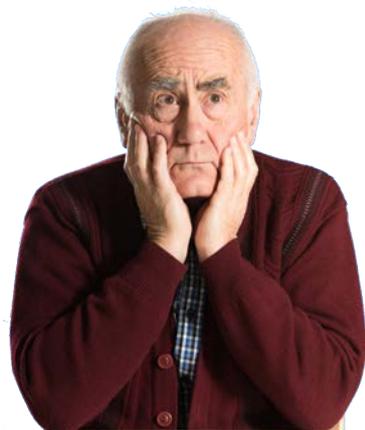
It is very hard to stop an addiction.

Harm



There are different types of harm:

Physical harm. This is damage to your body including your organs, blood vessels, skin, muscle or bones



Psychological harm. This could be damage to your mental health such as depression, anxiety or dementia



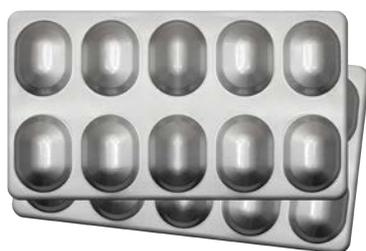
Social harm. this could be damage to your relationships, your friendships, your work

Addiction in older people



The most common substances that older people are addicted to are:

- Alcohol



- Strong painkillers - see page 15



- Benzodiazepines - these are a type of medication that are sometimes used to treat anxiety, panic and not being able to sleep - see page 16



What is 'too much alcohol'?

You shouldn't drink more than 14 units of alcohol a week.



A double glass of a spirit is 2 units



A medium glass of wine is 2 units



A pint of normal strength lager or beer is 2 units



A can of lager is 2 units

Alcohol



More older people now drink at home. They don't measure the amount of alcohol they drink.



On average, older people now drink more and younger people less than previous generations of the same age.



More older people are going to hospital because of drinking too much alcohol.



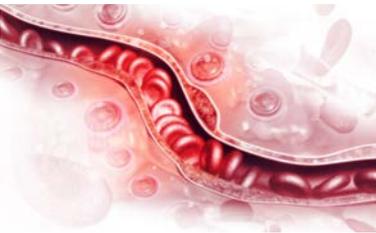
The highest rate of deaths from problems caused by alcohol are in older people.



Older people often don't know the harm caused by drinking too much.



Older people who are addicted to alcohol are different from younger people in these ways:



- They have more alcohol in their blood stream than a younger person who has drunk the same amount



- They can't get alcohol out of the bloodstream as easily as a younger person



- They are more likely to have bad effects from medicines that have been prescribed



- They are more likely to have health problems made worse



- They are more likely to be lonely



- They are more likely to be alone, have money worries or to have lost someone close to them



- They are more likely to be the victim of crime or neglect

Some ways to cut down drinking



- Don't go to the pub after work
- If you do go to the pub:
 - Eat something before you start drinking
 - Start drinking later in the day
 - Have a non-alcoholic drink before and between alcoholic drinks
 - Avoid drinking in rounds
 - Drink lower strength alcohol
 - Have smaller drinks
 - Take smaller sips



- Plan to do something else at the times when you used to have a drink



- Take some exercise or fresh air when you are bored and stressed



- Have some days each week when you don't drink



- Write down in your diary how much you drink on each day



- Tell your family and friends that you are cutting down and ask them to help you



Drinking less alcohol will mean:

- You will be in a better mood



- Your relationships will be better



- You will save money



- You will sleep better



- You'll have more energy



- You'll lose weight



- No hangovers



- Less chance of an accident



- Better memory



- You are fitter



- Less chance of getting ill

Painkillers



Lower back and neck pain is common.



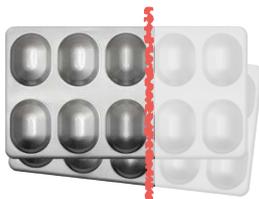
Doctors often prescribe strong painkillers called **opioids** for these problems.

Many people become addicted to these medicines.



You can try to avoid this addiction by:

- Asking about another drug for pain that is not an opioid
- Asking for treatment, like massage, that does not involve drugs
- Cutting down on opioids if they are not improving pain
- Making sure that the pain killer is helping more than it is harming you
- Checking you are not taking other drugs that might stop the opioid from working properly



Benzodiazepine



Benzodiazepines are a type of drug used for the treatment of sleep problems and anxiety.



A common type of this drug is called diazepam.



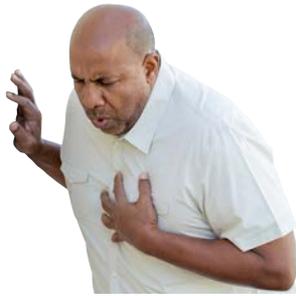
Benzodiazepines should not be taken for longer than 4 weeks.



Addiction to these drugs is more common in:

- Women rather than men
- People living in poorer areas
- People who have a lot of pain
- People who are having problems coping with daily life
- Someone who has always been a “worrier”





When you stop taking Benzodiazepines you may suffer from:

- Headaches, pain, and stiffness in the joints
- Weakness, tiredness, feeling dizzy
- A fast heartbeat, sweating
- Blurred vision
- Ringing in the ears
- Tingling and feeling numb in the arms and legs
- Feeling sick
- Not being able to sleep
- Feeling more tense
- Panic attacks and bad dreams
- Difficulty concentrating and remembering information

For more information

If you want more information you can contact:



- Alcohol and Older People: An information resource
www.alcoholandolderhealth.co.uk



- Alcohol and Older People: Mental Health Information Leaflet
www.rcpsych.ac.uk



- Alcoholics Anonymous
 - National Helpline: **0800 9177 650**
 - Email **help@aamail.org**



- Web: www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk

Easy read by easy-read-online.co.uk with help from [Mencap Liverpool](#)

This resource is part of the MindEd online learning site. For more information from MindEd please contact:-



Web: www.mindedforfamilies.org.uk



Email: MindEd@rcpsych.ac.uk



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