

ALCOHOL AND AGING

ALCOHOL FACTS

- Thirty seconds after the first sip, alcohol is already slowing impulse transmission in the brain.
- Alcohol causes a person to fall asleep faster, but when it wears off during the night it causes restlessness and wakefulness.
- Alcohol may cause dehydration, the symptoms of which are the classic “hangover” - fatigue, nausea, headache, muscle aches and irritability.
- With aging, the body processes alcohol more slowly; therefore, a smaller amount has a greater effect on the brain.
- Alcohol increases the risk of falls and accidents.
- Alcohol can interact with medication and can change the effectiveness or lead to side effects. For example, taking aspirin and drinking alcohol increases the risk of a stomach bleed.

ALCOHOL’S EFFECTS ON THE BRAIN

Short-term

- Difficulty walking
- Blurred vision
- Slurred speech
- Slow reaction times
- Poor judgement
- Reduced inhibitions
- Impaired memory, increasing the risk of drinking more because one forgets how much has already been consumed
- Blackouts

Long-term

- These effects are associated with heavy drinking, defined as 15+ drinks per week for a male and 8+ drinks per week for a female:
 - Memory decline that can be permanent and debilitating
 - Shrinkage of brain tissue may show on a CT of the head or MRI of the brain

QUANTITIES OF ALCOHOL

- If approved by your provider, a male should have no more than TWO drinks per day and a female ONE drink per day. A drink is defined as:
 - 12 oz beer
 - 5 oz wine
 - 1.5oz 80-proof liquor
- As a person ages, it is important to include 2-3 days per week in which no alcohol is consumed.

TIPS TO REDUCE ALCOHOL INTAKE

- Remove alcohol from the home.
- Eat food when drinking and sip the drink slowly.
- Avoid people and places that trigger excess drinking.
- Limit alcohol to special occasions.
- Water down drinks or replace alcohol with a “mocktail” made with juice and seltzer.
- Drink alcohol-free beer or wine, available at the local state store or online.
- Plan to arrive for a dinner engagement just in time to avoid pre-meal drinks and leave after dessert before others resume drinking.
- Choose alcohol-free activities to do with friends.