

Substance Use Among Older Adults



Wisconsin
Department of Health Services
Division of Care and Treatment Services
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Alcohol and Medications

Aging slows the body's ability to break down alcohol.

Older adults are more likely to take one or more medications that interact with alcohol. These can intensify the effects of alcohol.

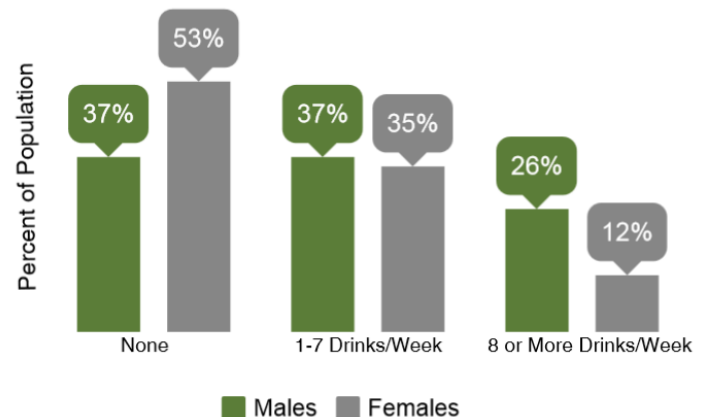
The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) suggests that adults over age 65 who are healthy and do not take medications should not have more than:

3 drinks on a given day
7 drinks in a week

Those with health problems or who are taking certain medications may need to drink less or not at all.

Alcohol, especially when mixed with medications, puts older adults at higher risk for falls, car crashes, and other accidents that can cause serious injury or death.

Number of Drinks per Week, Wisconsin, Aged 65+, 2014-2015*



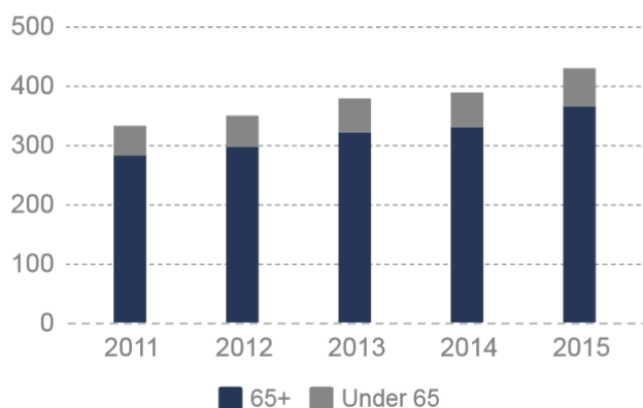
According to the Survey of the Health of Wisconsin (SHOW), 26% of males and 12% of females aged 65 or older drink 8 or more drinks per week. This is more than is recommended by NIAAA for this age group.

Know the Risks

People may become more sensitive to the effects of alcohol as they get older. This means that they can experience the same effects of alcohol with fewer drinks than when they were younger. Taking medications while drinking alcohol can intensify these effects and increase the risk of falls and other serious injuries. Many prescription medications, over-the-counter medications, and herbal remedies can be dangerous or even deadly when mixed with alcohol.

If you are taking a medication and do not know its effect, avoid drinking alcohol. Talk with your doctor, pharmacist, or other health care provider about the medications you are taking and how they may interact with alcohol. For more information about harmful interactions, visit <https://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/Medicine/medicine.htm>. If you know an older person showing signs of problems with alcohol or if you need help yourself, visit <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/adrc> to find an aging and disability resource center in your area.

Estimated Alcohol-Attributable Fall Deaths, by Age, Wisconsin



Overall, approximately 85% of fall deaths occur in the age group 65 and older.** Therefore, it is likely that approximately 365 of the 429 alcohol-attributable fall deaths in Wisconsin in 2015 were 65 or older.

Fast Facts

In Wisconsin, heavy drinking among older adults (age 65+) increased from 4% in 2013 to 6% in 2014 (BRFSS).

In Wisconsin, 11% of adults aged 65 or older reported binge drinking 12 or more days during the past year (SHOW, 2014-2015).

In Wisconsin, adults aged 65 or older reported using an average of 4.2 prescription drugs in the past month (SHOW, 2014-2015).

Among current drinkers aged 65 or older in the United States, 78% report using commonly prescribed medications that interact negatively with alcoholic beverages (Breslow, Dong, & White, 2015).

The use of at least one medication increased from 84% in 2005-2006 to 88% in 2010-2011 among those aged 62-85 in the United States (Qato, et al., 2016).

Sources:
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*These are preliminary data and have not been weighted or adjusted for the complex survey design.
**According to the Alcohol-Related Disease Impact (ARDI) software application specifications from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.