



Buzz, Body & Bites

A newsletter for actively aging adults
Virginia Cooperative Extension Family & Consumer Sciences
April 2022

Effects of Alcohol as We Age

Actively aging adults are drinking more than ever. Between 2002 and 2013 drinking in adults 65 and older shot up by 22%. Risky “binge” drinking, which is drinking more than five drinks at a time for men and four drinks for women, rose a whopping 65 percent. Now, about 5 in every 100 older adults are binge drinkers, which is a risk for unintentional injuries, chronic disease, cancer, and memory problems. So why are so many older adults drinking alcohol? Partly it is because people are living longer due to better nutrition and improvements in medicine, so there are just more older adults. We also bring our habits of alcohol use with us as we age. If we were used to a drink after work or in social settings with friends in the evenings, we continue that into retirement. Once retired, people have more time on their hands and drinking may start earlier, and be consumed in larger volumes.

The problem is that alcohol becomes more toxic with age. So, if you’re drinking more — or even if you’re just drinking the same amount — you can start having problems. Aging actually lowers the body’s tolerance for alcohol. Because of changes in muscle mass as we age, an older person who drinks will generally have a higher blood alcohol concentration than a younger person. The liver of older adults also processes alcohol more slowly contributing to these higher concentrations. Beyond this, alcohol can wreak havoc with many prescription and over-the-counter medications and can exacerbate health problems as we age like high blood pressure and heart disease.

You may have heard that a drink-a-day habit comes with some pretty impressive health benefits, including a lower risk of heart disease and a longer life. But those findings are up for debate. This is because people who drink one drink a day tend to also have a higher socio-economic status. They are more likely to get recommended health exams, do regular physical activity, and have healthier diets that leads to better health overall. Another misconception is that drinking will help you sleep. Actually, while a drink might help you drift off to sleep more easily, alcohol interferes with mentally restorative sleep, known as REM. This deep sleep, which rejuvenates the body and leaves you feeling refreshed in the morning, is more likely to be disrupted once the alcohol wears off.

The bottom line: An occasional drink is fine, but don’t kid yourself that it’s medicinal. The best way to stay healthy and enjoy your later years is to get regular physical activity, and eat a delicious, healthy diet.

Contributed by: Carlin Rafie PhD, MS, RD, Assistant Professor/Extension Specialist, Virginia Tech, Virginia Cooperative Extension

Tips for Cutting Back on Alcohol Intake

Limiting alcohol consumption is important at every age, but especially for older adults. The following are some recommendations if you would like to cut back on your drinking.

- Track how much alcohol you drink. Being aware of how much you are drinking is an important first step. The American Dietary Guidelines recommend not to start drinking if you do not already, and limit daily intake to no more than 1 drink for women and 2 drinks for men.
- Slow down. Start drinking later in the day or during parties. Drink more slowly in order to drink less.

- Use your time differently. We often drink due to boredom. Purposefully plan activities in your day — spend time with your grandchildren, plant a garden, join a club, meet with friends. Choose something that you enjoy.
- Address anxiety and depression. Some people may drink due to anxiety or depression. Seeking medical help to treat those problems can help reduce drinking.
- Get support. Ask family and friends to support you in your effort to moderate how much you are drinking.

Mocktail recipes

Looking for a fun, alcohol-free cocktail for your next party? Try one of these mocktails for a great alternative that your guests will love! Source: www.thespruceeats.com

Cucumber Margarita Mocktail

Ingredients:

- 1 pinch Kosher salt
- 2 lime wedges for rim and garnish
- ¾ cup limeade
- 2 tablespoons fresh lime juice
- 2 slices cucumber, plus more for garnish
- ½ teaspoon agave nectar

Instructions:

1. Spread salt on a plate. Rub 1 lime wedge on a cocktail glass rim; dip the rim in the salt.
2. Combine limeade, lime juice, cucumber and agave in a shaker. Break up the cucumbers with a muddler or spoon.
3. Fill shaker with ice; cover and shake. Strain the cocktail into the glass filled with ice. Garnish with a lime wedge and cucumber slices.

Virgin Piña Colada

Ingredients:

- 1 pinch Kosher salt
- 1 ½ cups unsweetened frozen pineapple chunks
- ¼ cup ice
- ¾ cup unsweetened pineapple juice
- ¾ cup unsweetened coconut milk
- 1-3 tablespoons brown sugar, optional
- Fresh pineapple wedges, garnish
- Maraschino cherries, garnish

Instructions:

1. Place frozen pineapple chunks and ice in a blender.
2. Add pineapple juice, coconut milk, and brown sugar, if using. Puree until smooth.
3. Pour into glasses, garnish with pineapple wedges and maraschino cherry.

Bicep Curls

Bicep Curls are the perfect strength exercise to help with daily tasks. They are inexpensive, light weight, portable, and can be used with both standing and sitting.

1. Stand with feet hip-width apart or sit up straight in a chair. Put the resistance band securely under both feet.
2. Hold the resistance band in both hands with palms facing out and straight wrists.
3. While keeping elbows close to your body, curl arms towards shoulders and pausing at the top. Make sure to keep wrists straight.
4. Release arms slowly and return to starting position.

Resources

Alcoholics Anonymous

alcoholicsanonymous.com/aa-meetings/virginia

University of California, Berkeley - Resistance Band and Body Weight Exercises

uhs.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/wellness-resistancebandexercises.pdf

American Association of Retired Persons (AARP)

aarp.org/earch/?q=Alcohol&c=everywhere

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Alcohol and Public Health

cdc.gov/alcohol/fact-sheets.htm

Rethinking Drinking

www.rethinkingdrinking.niaaa.nih.gov

NIAA Alcohol Treatment Navigator

alcoholtreatment.niaaa.nih.gov

Moderation Management

moderation.org

Editors: April Payne, MS; Carlin Rafie, PhD, RD; and Vanessa Santiago, MBA

Peer reviewers: Jane Henderson, MEd; Susan Prillaman, MS; Aisha Salazar, MS, and Pegi Wright, MEd

Subscribe at: buzzbodybites-g@vt.edu

Visit Virginia Cooperative Extension: ext.vt.edu

Virginia Cooperative Extension is a partnership of Virginia Tech, Virginia State University, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and local governments. Its programs and employment are open to all, regardless of age, color, disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, military status, or any other basis protected by law.

2022

HNFE-1012NP-A