

Assessment and Screening Issues for older adults

Using the method from
the Alcohol Related
Problems Survey (ARPS)



Key Points

- We can't drink as much as we used to without negative effects on health and well-being
- Older people develop alcohol problems at relatively low levels of alcohol use
- There are only three categories of drinking:
 - Health-wise (non-hazardous)
 - Risky (hazardous)
 - Harmful
- Ageing is not a barrier to identifying and treating alcohol-related problems



A Reminder about Standard Drinks

- A 330ml can of beer or a 100ml glass of table wine or a 30ml glass of straight spirits, equal approximately 10 grams of alcohol, depending on the alcohol percentage
- 10 grams of alcohol equals one standard drink
- To assess a 'problem' you need to know just how much alcohol is in a drink
- All alcohol packaging and containers now have to state the number of standard drinks they contain



Health-wise or Non-hazardous Use

- No health problems (physical, emotional or impaired daily activities) that may be influenced by drinking
AND
- No medicines that interact with alcohol
AND
- Drink 1-2 standard drinks each day or less

All three requirements must be met



Risky or Hazardous Use

- 1-2 standard drinks daily and have at least one health problem that may be influenced by drinking
OR
- 1-2 standard drinks daily and take at least one medication that interacts with alcohol
OR
- 3-4 standard drinks at one sitting once a month or less
OR
- Drive within two hours of drinking 3 or more drinks
OR
- 1 or more drinks 2-3 times a week and take six or more medicines.



Harmful Use

- 3 standard drinks or more daily and have at least one health problem that may be influenced by drinking
- OR
- 3 or more standard drinks daily and take at least one prescribed or over-the-counter medication that interacts with alcohol
- OR
- 3-4 standard drinks at one sitting or more than once a month
- OR
- 2-3 standard drinks and have any combination of health problems and medications that interact with alcohol



Alcohol-Related Problems

- **Physical problems:** result when alcohol causes an illness or makes an existing illness worse. These may include high blood pressure or diabetes
- **Emotional problems:** such as depression can be caused or worsened by alcohol use
- **Daily activities:** if problems like impaired vision or severe arthritis are affecting the ability to do ordinary things, alcohol can make it worse



A more comprehensive list of alcohol-related problems

- Accidents and falls
- Depression
- Gastrointestinal problems (diarrhoea, nausea, vomiting)
- Peptic (stomach) ulcers
- Liver disease
- Heart disease (including congestive heart failure)
- High blood pressure
- Diabetes



A more comprehensive list of alcohol-related problems cont...

- Stroke (haemorrhagic)
- Certain cancers (breast, mouth, liver, oesophagus)
- Inadequate self-care or grooming
- Difficulty climbing stairs or walking a block
- Incontinence
- Memory loss
- Sleep disorders
- Violence (to self and others)



Alcohol screening in older adults

Primary healthcare screening

- Older adults *less* likely to be screened
- Screening practices do not adequately screen health risk:
 - Risk ignores existing alcohol-related chronic health conditions
 - Risk ignores co-occurring use of alcohol-interacting medications
 - Risk ignores frailty
- Many older drinkers who are 'at risk' remain undetected
- The most reliable screening instrument is the Alcohol-Related Problem Survey (ARPS). This is still being validated and is not yet freely available.
- In the meantime, these are some of the questions you need to be asking:



Questions about drinking

1. Which best describes your drinking in the past 12 months
 - A. Less than one drink each day
 - B. 1-2 drinks daily
 - C. 3 or more drinks daily
 - D. 3-4 drinks per occasion once a month or more

Yes to A means drinking is probably health-wise

Yes to B indicates drinking may be 'risky'

Yes to C or D means the person is probably at risk for alcohol-related problems



Questions about medication (require a yes or no answer)

2. Do you take more than five medicines regularly?
(Yes/No)

e.g. For arthritis/pain; ulcer or stomach medicines; diabetes pills; high blood pressure medicines; blood thinners; heart medicine; seizure/epilepsy medicine; depression medicine; sedatives or sleeping pills; tranquilizers; antihistamines; antibiotics or antifungal medicines

3. Do you take one or more of these medicines at least once a week?
(Yes/No)



Questions about health problems

4. Has your doctor or other health worker **EVER** told you that you have one or more of these conditions?
(Yes or No)

- Heart/blood pressure
- Stomach/gastro-intestinal problems
- Cancer (of the lip, mouth, throat or breast)
- Brain/neurological problems (strokes, seizures, memory problems, dementia)
- Blood sugar (diabetes)
- Emotional (depression, anxiety)
- Alcohol-use disorders/chemical dependency



More on health conditions

5. Has your doctor or other health worker told you that you have one or more of these problems IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS?

(Yes/No)

- Hepatitis
- Gastritis with vomiting or nausea
- Malnutrition



More on health conditions

6. Have you felt depressed much of the time during the PAST FOUR WEEKS

(Yes/No)

7. Here are some symptoms that you might have had even if a doctor has not told you that you have a specific health condition:

Stomach pains, vomiting, nausea, diarrhoea, heartburn, losing weight without trying to, Getting injured, falling, tripping, bumping into things, problems sleeping, nervousness, shakiness, tiredness, memory problems, forgetfulness

Have you had one or more of these symptoms in the PAST 12 MONTHS?

(Yes/No)

8. Have you driven a car, truck or other vehicle within two hours after drinking 3 or more standard drinks in the PAST 12 MONTHS?

(Yes/No)



Physical Activities

9. The following are physical activities you might do in a typical day:
- Climbing one flight of stairs
 - Walking one block
 - Bathing or dressing yourself

Are you limited a lot in one or more of these activities because of your health?

(Yes/No)

10. During the **PAST 4 WEEKS** has it been very hard or impossible to do your usual daily activities, both inside and outside the house?

(Yes/No)



SCORING

- **Health-wise if you answered:**
 - Question 1 A or B up to 2 drinks daily
 - Questions 2-10 All **NO** i.e. no health problems or medicines that cause problems with alcohol
- **Risky if you answered:**
 - Question 1 B (up to 2 drinks daily) **AND**
 - Questions 2-10 one or more **YES**
- **Harmful if you answered:**
 - Question 1 C or D (1 or more drinks daily or binge drinking)
 - Questions 2-10 If you answered one or more **YES** the harm could be very serious

