



SENIOR HEALTH

Substance Abuse

HOW TO RECOGNIZE THE WARNING SIGNS AND GET HELP

Substance abuse can be a problem for people of all ages. But alcohol and drug abuse in the elderly can often go unnoticed. Older adults who didn't drink in their younger years can become heavy drinkers after retirement, when living alone or after moving into nursing homes. And alcohol and medications can affect older adults differently than they do younger people.

KNOW THE WARNING SIGNS

- neglecting physical appearance or personal hygiene
- memory problems
- tremors or dizziness
- ignoring responsibilities, such as feeding pets, paying bills, cleaning house or caring for a garden
- drinking increases in frequency and amount
- sadness, depression, increased crying spells
- increase in bruises, burns or other accidents
- resentment about references to drinking or medication consumption
- insomnia
- loss of appetite, loss of interest in food
- increased irritability and/or a general attitude change

GETTING HELP

People experiencing substance abuse problems usually can't stop by themselves. Caring, nonjudgmental intervention by family members or friends can be very successful.

People who develop a substance abuse problem later in life have a better recovery record than those who are younger. Once they decide to seek help, they're more likely to stay in a treatment program.

Don't delay getting help if you're concerned about your own or a loved one's alcohol or drug abuse. Seek

help from a doctor, therapist or chemical dependency organization. Local hospitals and health centers often have alcohol and substance abuse treatment programs available at little or no cost.

