

HEALTHWORD

Putting Health Promotion Back in Motion

March 2005

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HEALTHWORD is a monthly e-mail newsletter produced by the American Society on Aging's Live Well, Live Long project, funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Live Well, Live Long provides education and resources to professionals in the field of aging to help them improve health promotion and disease prevention efforts aimed at older adults. Current and past issues of this newsletter are available on the Live Well, Live Long website at <http://www.asaging.org/cdc/HealthWord.cfm>.

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FEATURE:

FOR OLDER ADULTS, IS DRINKING ALCOHOL A HEALTHY OR RISKY BEHAVIOR?

By Patrick C. Cullinane

Not a week seems to go by without another report on the beneficial effects of drinking alcohol. For adults ages 60 and older, what does this research mean? In a 12-year study of 38,000 male health professionals, Ting-Kai Li, director of the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, reported a "strong association between light-to-moderate alcohol consumption and reduced risk of heart disease." Yet alcohol probably kills more people than it saves. Few, if any, medical experts would advise elders to start drinking for health reasons.

What is "light to moderate drinking" for older adults? The recommended consumption level for older adults who drink is as follows:

* No more than one standard drink per day or seven drinks per week (a standard drink is 12 oz. of beer, 5 oz. of wine, 1.5 oz. of spirits, or 4 oz. of liqueur or aperitif)

- * A maximum of two drinks on any drinking occasion
- * Somewhat lower levels for older women

Aging-related changes make older adults more vulnerable to adverse alcohol effects. They have higher blood alcohol concentration from a given dose and more impairment at a given concentration. Higher levels of medication use and chronic illness among older adults put them at risk for negative interactive effects. Women, who have a lower percentage of body weight composed of water, are at greater risk than men for rapid intoxication.

For older adult drinkers, these conditions have the following implications:

- * Moderate levels of alcohol consumption can be more risky.
- * More consequences can result from maintaining a lifelong consumption pattern.
- * Increased consumption can quickly lead to a negative effect, such as a fall, which may have serious consequences for an older person's health status and health future.

The drinking patterns of older adults often surprise providers: 60 percent to 70 percent are abstainers, 20 percent are moderate drinkers (less than six drinks per week), 10 percent to 14 percent are at-risk drinkers (more than seven drinks per week), and 2 percent are alcohol dependent or alcohol abusive. The economic impact of older problem drinkers on the health system is significant. A 1993 study of Medicare charges for alcohol-related hospitalizations found rates among people 65 or older similar or higher than those for myocardial infarction or heart attack.

When discussing alcohol use with older adults, providers may face questions from their clients about how to drink responsibly. For people ages 60 and above, experts recommend the following:

- * Avoid consuming alcohol immediately prior to bedtime to avoid sleep disturbances.
- * Do not ingest alcohol prior to driving.
- * Abstain from alcohol if you're taking central nervous system depressants, all psychiatric medications, analgesics, anticoagulants, antidiabetic drugs, and some cardiovascular drugs.
- * Consider one drink per day a prudent level of alcohol consumption if you want to drink an alcoholic beverage, have no medical contraindications, and take no medications that interact with alcohol.
- * Consult a doctor or pharmacist about alcohol-drug interactions.
- * Report any side effects or loss of energy to a physician immediately.

Patrick C. Cullinane is director of special projects at the American Society on Aging. This article was adapted from one originally published in the July-August 2003 issue of The Journal on Active Aging.

TOOLS YOU CAN USE:
ALCOHOL AND OLDER ADULTS

Consult these resources for more information about alcohol consumption and older adults:

* “Substance Abuse Among Older Adults” (Technical Improvement Protocol #26), from the U. S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center on Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP). This free publication is available online: Visit <http://www.samhsa.gov/search/search.html> and enter the title into the search form.

* “At Any Age, It Does Matter.” This Web-based course, available on CSAP’s Prevention Pathways website, offers explanations of the physical and psychological effects of alcohol on aging adults. Visit http://preventionpathways.samhsa.gov/courses/aaap_intro.htm.

* Michigan Alcohol Screening Test -- Geriatric Version (MAST-G). The MAST-G is the most current valid and reliable screening instrument for older adults. A short version of the screening tool is available on the Prevention Pathways website. To view the test, visit http://preventionpathways.samhsa.gov/courses/aaac_07_pg02.htm.

* ASA’s Substance Abuse and Older Adults Training Program. The resources center of this American Society on Aging program provides an extensive annotated list of books, videos, and pamphlets. It also links to “Alcohol, Medications, and Aging: What Everyone Needs to Know,” a Web-based training program. Visit <http://www.asaging.org/aod/resources.cfm>.

WHCoA EVENTS

For the next year, HEALTHWORD will post websites listing White House Conference on Aging (WHCoA) events and draft resolutions affecting health promotion. To read more about the importance of participating in the planning process, read the December 2004 issue of HEALTHWORD (posted at <http://www.asaging.org/cdc/HealthWord.cfm>).

Fifth Annual Senior Injury Prevention Conference: The Tools of Prevention

Date: May 19, 2005

Location: Courtyard Marriott Hotel, Sacramento, Calif.

Sponsored by the Alameda County Senior Injury Prevention Project, the Center for Injury Prevention Policy and Practice, the UC Davis Medical Center, the California Department of Health Services, and Archstone Foundation, “The Tools of Prevention” will offer attendees an opportunity to examine assessment tools and innovative injury prevention materials and

resources, and speakers will cover a host of injury prevention topics. Health educators, injury prevention workers, outreach workers, nurses, physical therapists, occupational therapists, senior center managers, and residential facility managers are encouraged to attend.

The conference is a designated WHCoA event. Attendees will be given a forum to express their recommendations, suggestions, and concerns regarding the topics listed by WHCoA. Conference organizers will then collate their responses and use that information to submit a report to WHCoA. For more information, contact Colleen Campbell at (510) 577-3535 or ccampbel2@acgov.org.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Event: National Public Health Week -- Empowering Americans to Live Stronger, Longer
Dates: April 4-10, 2005

The theme of this year's National Public Health Week is empowering aging Americans to live longer, healthier lives. Older Americans often endure chronic physical and mental illnesses that could have been prevented or diminished if they were addressed early on. Help us promote the three P's for adding more healthy years to life:

- * PREVENT health problems by practicing healthy living
- * PROTECT your health through early detection and screening
- * Develop a PLAN to manage your health in later years

For more information, visit the American Public Health Association (APHA) website at <http://www.apha.org/nphw/05-letter.htm>. The American Society on Aging is partnering with APHA for National Public Health Week. Please let us know of any "healthy aging" events that will be taking place in your community during this week, and we will post or link to these events on our website. Contact ASA staffer Sandra Maldague at sandram@asaging.org by Wednesday, March 23, 2005.

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Event: 17th Annual Arizona Indian Council on Aging Conference
Dates: April 25-29, 2005
Location: Tucson Convention Center, Tucson, Ariz.

The purpose of this year's conference -- whose theme is "Living Well, Helping Others" -- is to focus on healthy practices and socialization as a means of advancing the well-being of American Indian elders and individuals with disabilities. Elders ages 55 and older, people with disabilities, service providers, caregivers, and those affecting policy and practices at community, state, and federal levels should attend. For more information, visit <http://www.itcaonline.com/event003/eventreg.html>.

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Event: Third Annual International Academy of Nutrition and Aging (IANA) Conference
Dates: May 6-8, 2005
Location: St. Louis, Mo.

The IANA Conference is designed to educate and provide networking opportunities to primary care physicians, geriatricians, family practice physicians, nutritionists, dieticians, nursing staff, and all other healthcare professionals. For more information, visit <http://www.boomeredu.com/ianaconference.htm>.

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Event: 85th Annual American Occupational Therapy Association Conference
Dates: May 12-15, 2005
Location: Long Beach, Calif.

This conference is for seasoned clinicians, practitioners, educators, scientists, clinical fieldwork educators, rehabilitation directors, and students. Workshops in gerontology and health promotion include the following:

- * Exercise and Aging in Occupation-Based Practice: How Does It Fit?
- * Occupational Therapy in Retirement Communities: Maximize Independence and Promote Aging in Place
- * Occupational Therapists: Valued Partners in Geriatric Medicine, Rehabilitation, and Health Promotion

For more information, visit <http://www.aota.org/nonmembers/area22/index.asp>.

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For more educational offerings in the field of aging, visit the searchable "Events in Aging" calendar on the ASA website: <http://www.asaging.org/calendar>.

Have an event related to health promotion and aging that you would like to tell your colleagues about? Please submit your event, call for papers, or grant announcements to Nancy Bui at nbui@asaging.org. Include the title, organization, date and time, location, contact information, and a short description of the event.

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