



HEALTHY AGING



MEDICATIONS AND ALCOHOL

Massachusetts Department of Public Health
Bureau of Substance Abuse Services
Bureau of Family and Community Health



Family, work, hobbies, travel...all this can keep you busy! Don't let problems with medications or alcohol slow you down. Take a few simple steps to get the most out of life!

Step 1: Know your medications

Medications should help you feel better and be healthy. But it's important that you use your medications safely and correctly. Taking medications correctly will help you to:

- Avoid unhealthy "interactions" (when medications react with each other and cause side effects).
- Prevent dangerous interactions with alcohol.

Did you know that “over-the-counter” medications and supplements can also cause interactions? These include anything you can buy without a prescription, such as:

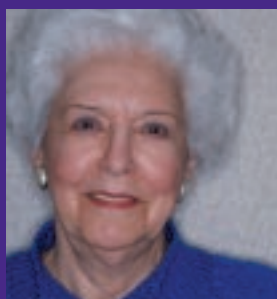
- Aspirin and pain relievers
- Cold or allergy medicine
- Antacids
- Laxatives
- Vitamins and minerals
- Herbal and dietary supplements

Here are some tips to help keep track of your medications:

- Make a list of your medications, what they are for, how much to take, and when to take them. Your pharmacist, nurse, or doctor can help you make this list. Be sure to include all prescriptions, over-the-counter medications, and herbal and dietary supplements.
- Use a medication chart. Order a free copy of “*Prescription Medicines and You: A Consumer Guide*” (800-358-9295), which includes a fill-in chart. Your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist may also have medication charts.
- Bring your list, chart, or all your medications to **all** your doctor visits.

And remember!

- Take medications as prescribed, and on schedule. If you have any questions, contact your health care provider.
- Don’t share prescription medications with others.
- Ask your doctor to go over all your medications and supplements at each visit. Check how much you take and if you still need to take it.
- Your doctor, nurse, and pharmacist are great resources and can answer your questions.





Step 2: Find out the facts about alcohol

Did you know that:

- Older adults are more sensitive to alcohol than younger adults.
- Alcohol can interact with some prescription and over-the-counter medications.
- Alcohol can be especially risky for people with high blood pressure, diabetes, liver disease, and dementia.
- Alcohol can cause or make health problems worse, and can contribute to falls, trouble sleeping, and heart problems.

You can help prevent problems with alcohol. Even if you have only a small amount on a special occasion, it's important to know how alcohol may affect you. Talk with your doctor or nurse to find out:

- If alcohol is safe for you
- How much is safe for you to drink
- If alcohol will interact with your medications (your pharmacist can also help)

Maximum recommended drinking limits for adults age 65 and older are:

- One drink per day for men
- Less than one drink per day for women

Drinking more than the recommended limit can be unhealthy.



Remember, one drink is:

- One can (12 oz.) of beer
- A single shot (1.5 oz.) of hard liquor
- A glass (5 oz.) of wine
- A small glass (4 oz.) of sherry, liqueur, or aperitif

Source: Consensus Panel, Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, US Department of Health and Human Services

Here are more tips for preventing interactions with medications:

- If you take sleeping pills, pain pills, or pills for anxiety (nerves), alcohol can be especially dangerous. Talk with your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist before you drink alcohol.
- Let your doctor or nurse know if you drink, even if it's just once in a while, so you can be as safe as possible.
- Look for warning labels on medications. Read the information that comes with each medication or talk with your pharmacist.
- Choose juice or sparkling water instead of alcohol.

Can alcohol be good for my health?

While some reports say a little alcohol might benefit some people, it can be very unhealthy for others. Here are some important tips:

- Talk with your doctor about alcohol.
- Don't drink more than the recommended limit.
- If you don't drink alcohol now, don't start.

Step 3: Watch out for problems

The tips in this brochure can help you prevent medication mistakes and problems with alcohol. Sometimes, though, life changes such as retirement or poor health can lead to a problem that requires help.

You can watch for signs of a medication or alcohol problem, such as:

- Poor memory
- Accidents or getting hurt
- Sleeping problems
- Feeling depressed

If you think you might have a problem, talk with someone who can help. You can talk with a family member, doctor, nurse, or staff at a senior center. You can also get help 24 hours a day by calling the Massachusetts Substance Abuse Information and Education Helpline at 800-327-5050.

If you think someone you know is having a problem with medications or alcohol:

- Let the person know you are concerned. Explain why, such as, “The last time I saw you, you seemed to have trouble keeping your balance.”
- Encourage him or her to talk with someone who can help.
- Let the person know that treatment for medication or alcohol problems can help.





Step 4: **Get the support you need**

Getting support—and giving support to others—can be good ways to help prevent problems and stay healthy. Here are some suggestions:

- Use the resources listed on the back of this brochure. Help can be just a phone call away.
- Get involved in free or low-cost activities at a recreational or senior center, place of worship, or other organization.
- Help others, volunteer.
- Pursue hobbies: work in a garden, cook, read, or listen to books on tape.
- Make new friends. Saying “hello” is often enough to start a friendship.



Resources

Medication Information and Assistance

- **Massachusetts Prescription Advantage Program**
800-AGE INFO (800-243-4636) (toll-free)
Information on the state's prescription medication program for elders and other elder services and programs, including local senior centers.
- **MassMedLine**
866-633-1617 (toll-free)
Information about free or low-cost prescription programs, and answers to health and medication questions. Interpreter services available.
- **"Prescription Medicines and You: A Consumer Guide"**
800-358-9295 (toll-free) • Includes a fill-in medication chart.
(US Department of Health and Human Services/AHRQ publication)

Substance Abuse Information and Treatment

- **Massachusetts Substance Abuse Information and Education Helpline** (24 hours, 7 days a week) • 800-327-5050 (toll-free)
TTY: 617-536-5872 • www.helpline-online.com
Information and referrals on alcohol and drug abuse services, programs, and related concerns.

Health

- **Massachusetts Health Promotion Clearinghouse**
800-952-6637 (toll-free) • TTY: 617-536-5872
www.maclclearinghouse.com • Free health brochures.
- **AARP (American Association of Retired Persons)**
www.aarp.org
Massachusetts AARP Chapter • 617-720-5600
TTY: 877-434-7598 (toll-free) • www.aarp.org/statepages/ma.html
Information and services about health, life changes, volunteer opportunities, grief and loss, and more.