



# Healthy Tips for February



## Alcohol and age: A risky combination



Most people drink less as they grow older. However, some maintain heavy drinking patterns throughout life, and some develop problems with alcohol for the first time during their later years. The many challenges that can arise at this stage of life — reduced income, failing health, loneliness, and the loss of friends and loved ones — may cause some people to drink to escape their feelings.

Several factors combine to make drinking — even at normal levels — an increasingly risky behavior as you age. Your ability to metabolize alcohol declines. After drinking the same amount of alcohol, older people have higher blood alcohol concentrations than younger people because of such changes as a lower volume of total body water and slower rates of elimination of alcohol from the body. That means the beer or two you could drink without consequence in your 30s or 40s has more impact in your 60s or 70s.

Your body might also experience other age-related changes that increase the risks associated with drinking. Your eyesight and hearing may deteriorate; your reflexes might slow. These kinds of changes can make you feel dizzy, high, or intoxicated even after drinking only a small amount. As a result, older people are more likely to have alcohol-related falls, automobile collisions, or other kinds of accidents. Drinking can also worsen many medical conditions common among older people, such as high blood pressure and ulcers.

In addition, older people tend to take more medicines than younger individuals, and mixing alcohol with over-the-counter and prescription drugs can be dangerous or even fatal.

Think before you drink!

Information obtained from Harvard HEALTHbeat Newsletter, January 27, 2018. For more information visit <http://www.health.harvard.edu>