

- Persons aged 65 and older constitute the fastest growing segment of the American population. (NIAAA 1999)
- More than 1/3 of people over the age of 65 in North America drink alcohol, and 10% of that population abuse alcohol. (Dateline 1998)
- Between 6 and 11 percent of elderly patients admitted to hospitals exhibit symptoms of alcoholism. (NIAAA 2000)
- The majority of elderly patients (76%) who sought treatment for binge drinking began drinking heavily in mid or late-life. (Dateline 1998)



Resources

In Lincoln:

Harvest Project 441-7940
(Local collaboration between Lincoln Area Agency on Aging, CenterPointe, and CMHC)

Lincoln Information for the Elderly 441-7070

On The Web:

<http://www.ias.org.uk/factsheets/default.htm>

http://www.be-safe.org/css_com/alcohol_abuse

<http://www.alcoholism.about.com/cs.elder>

For more information regarding alcohol, tobacco or drug issues contact:

Lincoln
Council on
Alcoholism and
Drugs, inc.

914 L Street
 Lincoln, NE 68508
 (402) 475-2694
 Fax: (402) 475-2699
prevention@lcad.org
www.lcad.org

This program is partially funded by Region V Systems, the United Way of Lincoln/Lancaster County, JBC, and private donations.

ALCOHOL and the Elderly



Alcoholism is common among the elderly in this country. However, many times addiction goes undiagnosed in this population.

People are at their greatest risk for substance abuse during times of transition in their lives. The move from middle age to late life is one such time. There are a number of things that occur during this time that increase stress:

- Retirement--loss of work Identity and activity level
- Death of a spouse
- Isolation when siblings or friends passed away
- Change in health
- Place in society changes as the next generation comes in.

The American Medical Association estimates alcoholism is misdiagnosed in about 70% of cases (1995). Many signs of alcohol abuse are similar to things that occur for other reasons among the elderly and physicians may or may not explore the possibility of alcohol abuse.

The signs and symptoms of addiction are the same among the elderly as they are for other populations. There are several behaviors that put this group at increased risk for misdiagnosis:

- Change in behavior--moods
- Change in appearance
- Increased incidence of falls
- Sudden onset or worsening of diabetes
- Negative response to prescribed medications
- Insomnia
- Depression
- Change in diet

These may indicate a medical problem or may point to a misuse of alcohol or prescription drugs.



Prevention

Family, friends and other systems of support are important factors in coping with stress in late life.

Making sure that elderly family members have opportunities to stay connected and useful gives them a great chance to build networks that will aide them through the transition.

Alcoholism can be successfully treated in the later years. Elderly alcoholics tend to respond well to treatment, and stay in their programs.

Where to Find Help:

- Alcoholics Anonymous
- Private Counselors
- Family Physicians