



FAMILY, FRIENDS AND CARERS GUIDE

WELCOME TO THE DRINK WISE, AGE WELL FAMILY, FRIENDS AND CARERS GUIDE

This factsheet intends to provide advice and information for anyone who is concerned about someone else's drinking. This can be a family member, a spouse or partner, or a close friend who is aged over 50.

HOW CAN I TELL IF THE PERSON IS DRINKING TOO MUCH?

- In all age groups, the majority of alcohol problems remain undiagnosed, but alcohol problems are even less likely to be detected in older adults.
- Older adults with alcohol problems are often ashamed of their alcohol use and may be more likely to try to hide it.
- The signs can also be difficult to notice. For example, things like confusion or falls are often wrongly attributed to ageing rather than drinking too much.



HOW DO I START THE CONVERSATION ABOUT MY LOVED ONE'S DRINKING?

Sometimes it can be difficult to even start a conversation with someone you care for about their alcohol use. As a starting point, avoid bringing up the subject of their drinking when they are under the influence of alcohol. This will possibly result in arguments and increased emotions on both sides.

- Look for opportunities to talk to them about their drinking, such as when they express regret or talk about something bad that has happened when they have been drinking.
- Try to start the conversation by explaining that you love and care for them. It is important that the person still feels 'connected' and a valued member of the family/friendship group.
- Always avoid a confrontational style. If the person is continuing to deny their problem or are rationalizing their alcohol use, end the discussion and try again another time.
- In general try to concentrate on their health and wellbeing rather than the actual alcohol use.

Some questions you could start with are:

“ I have noticed that you have not met your friends at the club for a while, has something changed for you recently?

Is there something that you are worrying about?

You don't seem to be sleeping so well recently, do you know what could be causing this? ”

Starting the conversation about a loved ones drinking;

can be beneficial in keeping the person safe

will increase the likelihood of them making and maintaining positive changes

can have positive benefits for those around them

Remember that the person drinking is responsible for their choices and behaviours, and only they can make the decision to change their drinking behaviour.

WHAT PRACTICAL HELP CAN I OFFER?

On a practical level, there are things you can put in place to ensure the environment is safer for your loved one or friend:

Practical help	
Make sure there are no loose wires to trip over.	Ensure walkways and stairs are de-cluttered.
Prompt them to turn off gas and electrical appliances before they start to drink.	Prepare food and ensure they have snacks available and accessible.
Make sure they have a working smoke detector.	Keep their house phone or mobile charged and within reach.
Encourage them to take a shower or bath before they start drinking, to prevent accidents.	Talk about safer drinking habits, having non-alcoholic drinks in between alcoholic drinks and eating before drinking.
Have medication dispensed in pharmacy dispensing boxes for easy monitoring of timing and dosage (speak to your local pharmacist about this).	If they are asking you to buy them alcohol this can be a very difficult call to make. You may feel it is safer to buy them alcohol rather than they risk falling or an injury while they are out. On the other hand you are 'enabling' the behaviour which makes it harder to then have a conversation about change. In these situations you have to set clear boundaries.

WHAT TRIGGERS SHOULD I BE AWARE OF?

People can develop a drink problem at any stage in life. However, there are lots of changes in life experience and circumstances that can cause people to drink more alcohol.

These can include;

Retirement

Changes in routine

Loss and bereavement

Finding it harder to sleep

Many of us may experience other challenges such as;

Changes in financial circumstances

Housing difficulties, or moving into residential care

Changes in relationships such as becoming a carer for a spouse

Isolation and loneliness can increase as social networks change



WHAT WARNING SIGNS SHOULD I LOOK OUT FOR?

The signs below may indicate a person is drinking alcohol and it is causing them problems. These pointers may also indicate other underlying health problems, so it is important to have a sensitive and supportive discussion with the person you are concerned about.

Warning signs	
Is the person isolating his or herself more?	Are they declining social invitations?
Have they stopped doing activities they previously enjoyed?	Have you observed changes in their home environment?
Is the person's appearance becoming more unkempt?	Are there signs of empty bottles or overflowing bins?
Are they trying to conceal alcohol bottles?	Are they becoming increasingly forgetful?
Have they had more falls and injuries?	Has their general demeanour changed?
Do they appear to be under the influence of alcohol, with indications like smelling of alcohol and slurred speech?	Are they asking you to buy them alcohol regularly and becoming quite agitated if you refuse?



HOW CAN I SEEK HELP FOR A LOVED ONE WHO IS DRINKING HEAVILY?

If you live in one of the Drink Wise, Age Well areas we can offer support and advice for a loved one or friend you may be concerned about.

We have professionally trained staff who can provide one to one, individually tailored care that will support any individual over 50.

Other ways you can help:

- Offer to visit their GP or health professional with them to discuss any worries or difficulties they may have.
- Reassure them you are not judging them but only care about their health and well-being.
- Include them in any social activity or plans, even if they are refusing to go. Keeping them involved will give them an important sense of worth and connection with you.

Alcohol dependency

If someone has been drinking heavily for some time, it may be dangerous to just stop drinking suddenly as this can result in an alcohol withdrawal which can be a serious medical condition. This is known as alcohol dependence.

If you have any concerns for someone's health or well-being always seek medical help from your GP or in an emergency call 999.

Signs of alcohol withdrawal include:

Being very shaky (tremors)

Insomnia

Feeling nauseous and retching

Feeling agitated

Feeling very confused

Fever and sweating

Seeing or feeling things that aren't there

And, in some, cases fits and seizures

WHERE CAN I GET HELP?

If you would like to access support for yourself, a loved one or family member you can get in touch via our confidential over 50s alcohol helpline on 0808 801 0750 or visit our website at www.drinkwiseagewell.org.uk.

Other helpful contacts:

www.alcoholchange.org.uk

www.wearewithyou.org.uk

www.al-anon.uk.org

www.adfam.org.uk

www.nacoa.org

You can also ask your own GP for support and advice.