

# FACT SHEET ON ALCOHOL ABUSE IN THE ELDERLY

*For more  
information or  
inquiries, call the  
Dementia  
Education &  
Training Program  
at  
1-800-457-5  
679*

1. Alcohol and prescription drug abuse is common in older persons.
2. Many elders (8%) are problem drinkers.
3. Excessive alcohol consumption damages the brain, heart, liver, pancreas, peripheral nerves, and muscles in older persons.
4. Most older alcoholics, i.e., two-thirds, go unrecognized by their primary care physician.
5. Untreated alcohol withdrawal, i.e., delirium tremens, may have a 15-30% mortality in older persons.
6. Alcoholic DTs usually occur two or three days after the last drink.
7. Many (25%) problem drinkers will reduce alcohol consumption if a doctor spends 15 minutes discussing damage produced by alcohol.
8. Alcoholic dementia is a common cause of intellectual decline in older persons.
9. Alcohol may increase the symptoms of depression.
10. Many (10%) older persons who visit a doctor's office suffer from alcohol abuse.
11. Medicare pays more money for alcohol-related diseases in the elderly than heart attacks.
12. Alcoholism in the elderly is a silent epidemic that causes health problems, dementia, disability, and death.