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Myths/Facts About Alcohol and Older Adults

Myth: My father has been drinking all his life. He's too old to change.

Fact: You are never too old to change. Older adults have the best recovery rate from addictions of any age group.

Myth: Drinking is the only pleasure they have left. Why deprive them of the one thing that makes them happy?

Fact: Alcohol is a depressant. Alcohol abusers feel guilty, ashamed and depressed, not happy.

Myth: The doctor says a glass of wine in the evening is good for the heart.

Fact: Is the person on any type of medication? If so, mixing medication with alcohol can be dangerous and even deadly.

Myth: They drink to relieve the pain.

Fact: Are they on pain medication? Mixing medications with alcohol can be dangerous and even deadly. Once the alcohol wears off the physical problem will still exist.

Myth: I'm only a neighbor. I'm sure their family would do something if it were that bad.

Fact: Their family may not know about the problem, especially if they live far away. You may be the only source of help available to him.

Myth: He/she is too respectable to be an alcoholic.

Fact: Alcoholism has nothing to do with personality, it is a disease. Nice older people can have this disease.

Myth: He/she is too old to have become an alcoholic.

Fact: Alcoholism can occur at any age.

Myth: I never see her/him drink alcoholic beverages.

Fact: Alcoholics often keep their drinking habits secret.

Myth: He/she is not always drunk.

Fact: Few alcoholics remain continually drunk. It is their continual dependence on alcohol that defines their alcoholism.

Myth: Her/his family is so respectable that alcoholism is not possible.

Fact: Many older alcoholics have nice families and are able to be an active part of their families while denying their disease.

Myth: He/she only drinks wine or beer not distilled liquor, so he/she is not an alcoholic.

Fact: Any beverage containing alcohol is capable of triggering alcohol abuse.

Myth: Let him/her have the alcohol. He/she doesn't have that much longer to live. Besides, older people cannot change their habits.

Fact: Alcoholism is a chronic disease requiring treatment to enable healthy, happy life. Older people can learn and change.

Myth: She/he has always been such an independent, strong-willed person. I'm sure she/he will be able to overcome the need for alcohol.

Fact: Alcoholism cannot be cured by willpower alone, but it can be treated medically and with counseling.

[Source: "Alcoholism and the Older Adult: Messages of Concern," Nancy J. Osgood, Ph.D.]

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Virginia Commonwealth University, Department of Gerontology

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