

## Preventive aspects of addictions in old age

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Around the world, increasing numbers of individuals are abusing drugs and alcohol in their later years.

Evidence suggests that the current “Baby Boom” cohort of aging adults, born from the mid-1940s to mid-1960s, abuses alcohol and psychoactive prescription medications at a higher rate than previous generations did. The “Baby Boomers” generally have more favorable attitudes towards substance use, and in their lifetimes, have had easy access to and increased reliance on prescription medication.

Alcohol and drug use among older or elderly patient has received relatively little attention clinically and in terms of research initiatives. Identifying addictions in the elderly can be challenging, since substance abuse in older people is frequently hidden. The health effects of substance use in the geriatric population can be more dangerous than in younger substance abusers. Chronic health conditions and prescribed medications can increase the adverse effects of substance use.

One of the most commonly abused substances alongside tobacco, misuse of alcohol is often a hidden phenomenon.

Treatment for substance abuse in elderly people may consist of brief interventions, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, contingency management, motivational enhancement therapy, family and community based treatment mutual support, 12-step therapies, and residential treatment facilities. Programs should consider the special needs of elderly people including medical and social service needs.

Evidence for best practices in the older population is lacking.

At the same time, we would like to confirm the importance of spiritual aspects during the everyday care of the elderly and in the alleviation of possible addictions. Our conclusions are also confirmed by our own pilot study, which we conducted in 2024 during the survey of caregivers of the elderly. Another example is the spiritual content of the 12-step treatment used within the framework of AA.

Our experiences with a support group open to elderly caregivers of relatives living with dementia, which has been running continuously for 16 years, are as follows: The group, which takes place within the framework of the “Bálint” therapeutic group, has a strong preventive potential in terms of the development of possible dependencies. It strengthens the self-esteem of the participants and the effectiveness of coping of the caregivers with significant stress resulting from the treatment of relatives.

### **Conclusion**

As demographics change, cases of geriatric addictions are more frequently encountered in clinical practice. Substance abuse can complicate all aspects of the aging process physical and mental health. As clinicians, we can improve our skills at diagnosing and treating substance abuse in the elderly as we increase our awareness of the scope of this problem and gain better understanding in this important area of practice.