

## Seniors and Addiction: A Very Real Threat to Well-Being



When picturing a person with an addiction, not many people would imagine a senior citizen. However, seniors are much more commonly found to be struggling with addiction than you may think. In fact, widowers aged 75 or older have the [highest rate](#) of alcoholism compared to other demographic groups in the U.S.

If you have an aging loved one, you may have never considered the risk of addiction when thinking about their care and well-being. But given that addiction is common in the older adult population, it's worth understanding the risks and warning signs.

### Seniors Often Struggle with Prescription Drug Abuse

The vast majority of seniors in the U.S. are on some form of medication or another. It's simply a part of aging. However, many seniors find themselves abusing their [prescriptions drugs](#) as a means to self-medicate or numb feelings of loneliness, grief, or other emotional turmoil.

Seniors are all too often socially isolated, particularly following the death of a partner. Social isolation can have detrimental effects on mental health, leading to depression or anxiety, for instance, as well as an increased potential for substance abuse. Some seniors may be more likely to be prescribed prescription pain medication for managing chronic pain, and these medications come with a high potential for addiction.

### Alcoholism is Common in Seniors

Alcohol is one of the most common addictions in the world due to its widespread use and acceptance in society. In seniors, drinking in private can become very easy if they are socially isolated and cannot find better ways to fill their time. Loneliness and boredom can very easily lead to a serious alcohol addiction, particularly if the people who spend a lot time with them do not take their drinking seriously.

Furthermore, alcoholism is most damaging to seniors. An alcohol addiction at 25 can be treated and recovered from, while an addiction later in life may have more lingering effects. If you notice [signs](#) of an alcohol problem, do not brush them off. Get your loved one help.

### **Preventing Addiction is Possible**

The leading cause of addiction in seniors is a decrease in mental health. Social isolation is the biggest concern for many older adults, which leads to an overall decline in well-being, feelings of depression, sadness, and loneliness, all of which can make a person more likely to turn to substances and develop an addiction.

One of the most effective ways to [prevent](#) addiction is to ensure that your loved one is socially active. Social interaction helps seniors maintain cognitive abilities such as memory, improve mental well-being, and even boost their physical health while eradicating the perceived need to abuse substances.

It is also important that your loved one undergoes grief counseling following a death. Grief is one of the more common reasons a senior will begin to drink or abuse substances, particularly if they are not seeking professional mental health treatment to cope with their loss.

Though you may have never considered addiction in your aging loved ones, it is important that you understand the risks. Addiction can be extraordinarily detrimental to seniors and too often goes untreated. Do your best to prevent social isolation and be on the lookout for the symptoms of addiction.

If your loved one is experiencing mental deterioration, it might be a good idea to consider assisted living facilities to aid with medication. It might seem hard to believe that your loved one could develop an addiction to drugs or alcohol, but it is your job to know the risks and do the right thing if you notice warning signs or are aware of a potential addiction.