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Links for more information:

West Virginia Addiction Recovery Support

- Keyser, Moorefield, Petersburg, Romney: Phone: 800-777-1515, <http://gatewaytofreedomna.org>
- North Central WV (Charleston, Morgantown) Phone: 304-344-4442
- Charleston, Parkersburg, Morgantown, Clarksburg, Buckhannon Phone: 800-766-4442, <http://mrscna.org>
- Tri-State Region: Phone: 888-251-2426, <http://www.tristate-na.org>
- Wheeling Area: Phone: 888-251-2426, <http://www.wheelingna.org>

West Virginia State Agency Resources

WV Bureau for Behavioral Health & Health Facilities
350 Capitol Street. Room 350
Charleston, WV 25304
Phone: 304-558-0627
Fax: 304-558-1008
<http://www.dhhr.wv.gov/bhhf>

Aging and Alcohol at the Cellular Level

The more alcohol that people drink, the more their cells appear to age. In a new study that was shared at the 40th annual scientific meeting of the Research Society on Alcoholism (RSA) in Denver June 24-28, researchers found that alcoholic patients had shortened telomere lengths, placing them at greater risk for age-related illnesses, such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer and dementia.

"Telomeres, the protein caps on the ends of human chromosomes, are markers of aging and overall health," said Naruhisa Yamaki, M.D., a clinical fellow at the Kobe University Graduate School of Medicine. Yamaki explained that every time a cell replicates, a tiny bit of telomere is lost, so they get shorter with age. But some groups may have shorter telomeres for reasons other than aging.

"Our study showed that alcoholic patients have a shortened telomere length, which means that heavy drinking causes biological aging at a cellular level," he said. "It is alcohol rather than acetaldehyde that is associated with a shortened telomere length." Yamaki and his co-authors recruited 255 study participants from alcoholism treatment services at Kurihama National Hospital in Yokosuka, Japan: 134 alcoholic patients and 121 age-matched controls or non-alcoholics, ranging in age from 41 to 85 years old. DNA samples, as well as drinking histories and habits, were collected from all participants.

Yamaki added that it's important for the public to understand that heavy drinking causes telomere shortening because "awareness of this fact provides important information necessary for people to live healthier." Yamaki presented these findings during the RSA 2017 meeting on Sunday, June 25 at the Hyatt Regency Denver.

Substance Abuse and Misuse Among Older Adults

As we get older, our bodies begin to react differently to alcohol and medications than when we were younger. Many older people take many different medications, which may not mix well with each other or with alcoholic drinks. If older adults do not adjust for these changes in their bodies and do not use medications safely, they may experience problems with substance misuse without even knowing it. Some physical and mental problems that people think are just a normal part of aging or the result of an illness may actually be caused by drinking too much, incorrect use of medications, or mixing medications and alcohol unsafely.

Why are the dangers different for older people? Getting older causes changes in your body that can make you respond differently to alcohol and medications. These changes mean that there are differences between the way older adults and younger adults' bodies can handle alcohol. The same amount of alcohol or number of drinks that had hardly any effect before can now make someone feel drunk. This means that as people get older, they can feel the effects with less alcohol (increased sensitivity) and they can't drink as much as they used to (decreased tolerance to alcohol). Also, alcohol is processed by the body (metabolized) more slowly in older bodies, so blood alcohol levels are higher for a longer amount of time after drinking. This may mean increased danger of accidents, falls, and injuries for older adults even many hours after they drink alcohol.

Warning Signs of Alcohol or Medication-Related Problems

- Anxiousness or irritability (feeling worried or "crabby")
- Memory loss (trouble remembering things)
- New problems making decisions
- Difficulty concentrating or paying attention
- Lack of interest in usual activities
- Sadness or depression
- Mood swings (happy one minute, sad or angry the next)
- Chronic pain (pain that doesn't go away)
- Problems with money or the police
- Falls, bruises, burns
- Incontinence (can't control urinating, wetting the bed)
- Headaches
- Dizziness
- Poor hygiene (not combing hair, bathing)
- Poor nutrition, changes in eating habits (eating junk food only)
- Out of touch with family and friends
- Suicidal thoughts (wanting to kill yourself)
- Strange response to medication



Talk to your doctor about the dangers of drinking with your current or past health conditions. Find out how much you should drink while taking your medications. Be sure to ask about all the medications you are taking now or take sometimes, including over-the-counter or herbal medicines.