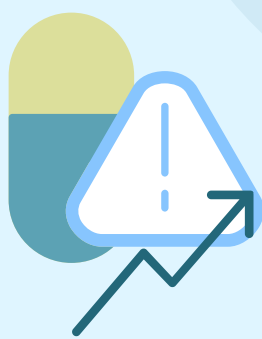


# Addressing the Issue - Substance Misuse Amongst Elderly Adults



## WHY ARE ELDERLY ADULTS SUSCEPTIBLE TO SUBSTANCE MISUSE/ABUSE?

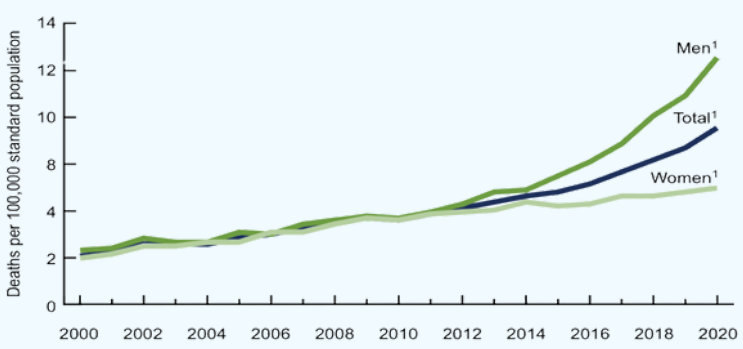
- As the body ages, it often cannot absorb and break down drugs and alcohol as easily as it once did.<sup>1</sup>
- Older adults are more likely to unintentionally misuse medicines by forgetting to take their medicine, taking it too often, or taking the wrong amount.<sup>1</sup>
- Some older adults may take substances to cope with big life changes such as retirement, grief and loss, declining health, or a change in living situation.<sup>1</sup>
- Older adults may be more likely to experience mood disorders, lung and heart problems, or memory issues. Drugs can worsen these conditions, exacerbating the negative health consequences of substance use.<sup>1</sup>
- Chronic health conditions tend to develop as part of aging, and older adults are often prescribed more medicines than other age groups, leading to a higher rate of exposure to potentially addictive medications.<sup>1</sup>



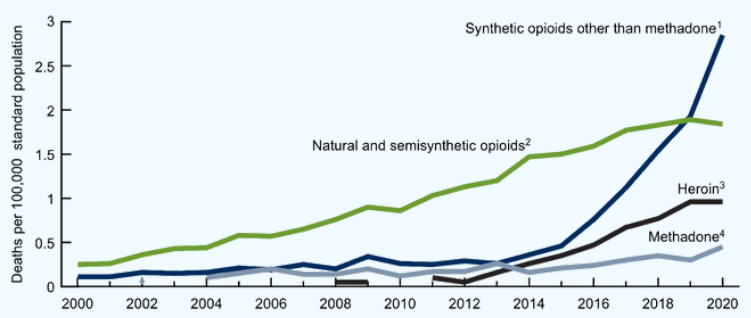
**IN 2021:**  
**1 in 370** senior deaths stemmed from overdoses  
 ~13% of senior overdoses were intentional  
**83%** of senior overdoses were unintentional<sup>2</sup>

For more information about preventing substance abuse/misuse, visit our resource directory!  
[babyloncares.org/prevention-resource-directory/](http://babyloncares.org/prevention-resource-directory/)

AGE-ADJUSTED DRUG OVERDOSE DEATH RATE FOR ADULTS AGED 65 AND OVER, BY SEX: UNITED STATES, 2000-2020



AGE-ADJUSTED RATE OF DRUG OVERDOSE DEATHS INVOLVING OPIOIDS FOR ADULTS AGED 65 AND OVER, BY TYPE OF OPIOID: UNITED STATES, 2000-2020



# Tips for Prevention - Substance Misuse Amongst Elderly Adults



- 1 Read all medicine labels and be sure to follow instructions. Don't take a larger dose of a medicine, thinking it will help you more and don't skip or take half doses of a prescription drug to save money.<sup>4</sup>
- 2 Take medicine on time. Some people use meals or bedtime as reminders to take their medicine. Others use charts, calendars, or weekly pill boxes. You can also set timers and write reminders to take your medication. Medication reminder apps can help you remember when and how to take your medications each day.<sup>4</sup>
- 3 Turn on a light. Don't take medicine in the dark; you might make a mistake.<sup>4</sup>
- 4 Call your doctor right away if you have any trouble with your prescriptions, over-the-counter medicines, or supplements. There may be something else you can take.<sup>4</sup>
- 5 Tell your doctor about alcohol, tobacco, and drug use. Alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs can affect how well your medicines work. Be honest with your doctor about how much you use.<sup>4</sup>
- 6 Ask your loved ones for help. Take a friend or relative with you to your doctor's appointments if you think you may need help understanding or remembering what the doctor tells you.<sup>4</sup>
- 7 Take prescription medicine until it's finished, or your doctor says it's all right to stop. Note that some medicines are supposed to be taken only "as needed."<sup>4</sup>
- 8 Don't share. Do not take medicines prescribed for another person or give yours to someone else.<sup>4</sup>
- 9 Dispose of unused, unwanted, or expired medication safely.<sup>5</sup>
- 10 Never mix pain medicines with alcohol, sleeping pills, or illicit substances.<sup>4</sup>

**Physical risk factors for substance use disorders in older adults:** chronic pain; physical disabilities or reduced mobility; transitions in living or care situations; loss of loved ones; forced retirement or change in income; poor health status; chronic illness; and taking a lot of medicines and supplements

**Psychiatric risk factors for substance use disorders in older adults:** avoidance coping style; history of substance use disorders; previous or current mental illness; and feeling socially isolated

**RECOGNIZING OPIOID OVERDOSE**

- Extremely pale face and/or feels clammy to the touch
- Body going limp
- Fingernails or lips have a purple or blue color
- Vomiting or making gurgling noises
- Cannot be awakened or are unable to speak
- Breathing or heartbeat slows or stops

**TREATING OPIOID OVERDOSE**

- Call 911
- If the person has stopped breathing or if breathing is very weak, begin CPR (best performed by someone who has training)
- If available, treat the person with naloxone to reverse opioid overdose

Sources:  
 1. National Institute on Drug Abuse; National Institutes of Health; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
 2. Jones, C., et al. (2023). Association of Receipt of Opioid Use Disorder-Related Telehealth Services and Medications for Opioid Use Disorder With Fatal Drug Overdoses Among Medicare Beneficiaries Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic. JAMA Psychiatry. 2023;80(5):508-514. doi:10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2023.0310  
 3. National Center for Health Statistics, National Vitals Statistics System  
 4. NIH National Institute on Aging (NIA)  
 5. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)