

# Addressing Alcohol Use in Nursing Facilities

## Health Effects of Drinking Alcohol

While drinking any amount of alcohol carries risk, mixing alcohol with certain medications can cause nausea, vomiting, headaches, drowsiness, fainting, or loss of coordination. Alcohol can also make some medicines less effective or even harmful to the body.<sup>1</sup>

Drinking alcohol can lead to health problems such as high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, liver disease and digestive issues. It can also result in cancer of the breast, mouth, throat, esophagus, voice box, liver, and colon.<sup>2</sup>

Excessive alcohol use can lead to memory problems such as alcohol-related dementia. In addition, consuming alcohol very quickly can increase the risk of harm, such as blackouts and falls. It can also increase the risk of unpredictable or violent behavior toward other residents or staff members.<sup>3</sup>



## Unauthorized Alcohol Use

Residents may consume alcohol while away from the facility, on weekend passes or during an off-campus trip. Some residents may also gain possession of alcohol during visitation without staff's knowledge.

## Proactive Steps Staff Can Take To Support Residents

- Discuss the dangers of undisclosed alcohol use with residents.
- Provide education to residents on alcohol *use* versus alcohol *abuse*.
- Discuss safe drinking standards with residents – two drinks or less per day for men and one drink or less per day for women.
- Administer routine alcohol screening questionnaires to residents upon admission and as needed.
- Coordinate follow-up substance use treatment/support when applicable.
- Utilize written policy and behavioral contracts to work with residents who are not in compliance with the facility's drinking policy.

# Promoting Responsible Drinking for Residents in Nursing Facilities

- If a resident requests alcohol use while in a nursing facility, it must be ordered by the physician. The physician order must be documented before providing alcohol to residents.
- Consult with the attending physician to review medication or disease contraindications.
- Residents participating in social events, such as a planned happy hour or a holiday event, should have a physician's order to consume alcoholic beverages during those events.
- Institute a drink limit (e.g., two drinks) guided by input from the treatment team and physician.
- Educate staff serving alcohol on standard drink sizes.
- Provide plenty of non-alcoholic drinks and food on occasions when alcohol will be offered.
- Offer alternative diversional activities to residents who struggle with alcohol misuse.

## STANDARD DRINK SIZES



## CMS Behavioral GUIDANCE §483.10(f)(4)(ii)-(v)

“Reasonable clinical and safety restrictions” include a facility’s policies, procedures or practices that protect the health and security of all residents and staff. These may include, but are not limited to:

- Denying access to visitors who are inebriated or disruptive.
- Denying access or providing supervised visitation to individuals with a history of bringing illegal substances into the facility and putting residents’ health and safety at risk.
- Educating staff on warning signs of drinking outside of planned events, such as odors of alcohol and marked changes in personal appearance and coordination. Staff should report any concerns to the nursing supervisor.

## REFERENCES

1. [Harmful Interactions: Mixing Alcohol with Medicines](#)
2. [Dietary Guidelines for Alcohol](#)
3. [Alcohol Withdrawal](#)