

Overview of Substance Misuse & Abuse in the Older Adult

Education for Health Care Professionals

Part 2: Risk Factors & Causes



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Aging as a Risk for Misuse/Abuse



- Many older adults are not aware of the increased risks associated with substance use due to age related changes.
- Age related changes to vision and memory can increase the chance of substance misuse, particularly overconsumption.
(CIHI, 2016)

- Common experiences of aging related to loss, change, and decline can be triggers for misuse or abuse of substances.
- As adults grow older they are more likely to have co-morbidities and complex health issues which can increase the likelihood of prescription related complications, misuse and abuse.

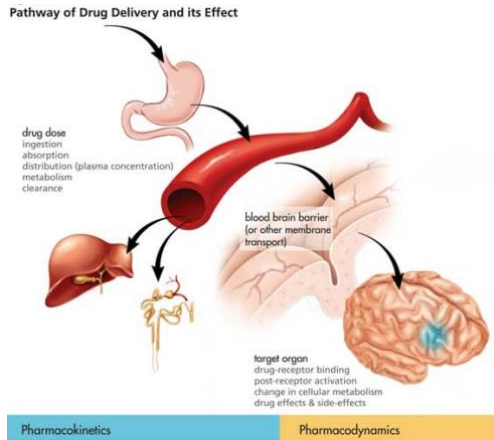
([CIHI, 2016](#); [SHRTN, 2011](#))



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Effects of Aging on Pharmacokinetics & Pharmacodynamics >>

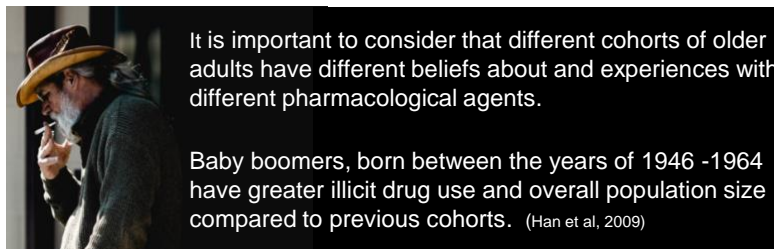


Age-related changes to cardiac structure and function, the renal system, gastrointestinal system, neuroendocrine response and body composition effect the **PHARMACOKINETICS** and **PHARMACODYNAMICS** of drugs.

(Mangoni & Jackson, 2004)

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Context of Cohort Culture



Illicit drugs available today are in many ways quite different from those available in the decades past. Increased potency and other engineered differences may likely influence drug action on the older body. For example the increased presence of fentanyl and other agents being added to cannabis and other drugs greatly increases the risk of accidental overdose. (CIHI, 2016)

(Han et al., 2009; CIHI, 2016)

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Risk Factors for Misuse/Abuse

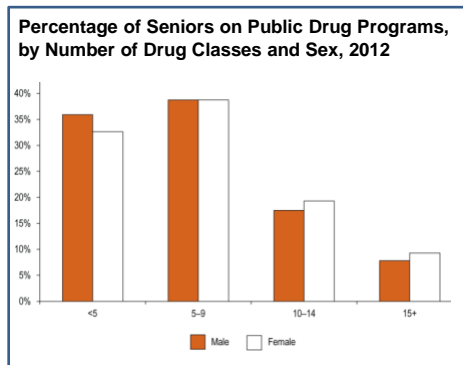
With a long life can come many losses of friends and family members, employment and independence. Declining health, mobility, financial stability, and cognitive function can contribute to use or abuse substances in an attempt to cope with these issues. Other contributing risk factors include:

- previous or long-term substance use
- comorbid mental health issues (depression, anxiety)
- unaddressed mental health issues
- chronic pain
- sleep problems
- social isolation and lack of personal support
- low health literacy
- involvement in crime
- inmate status

(Basca, 2008; Taylor & Grossberg, 2012; Gossop, 2008; SAMHSA, 2017;; AddictionCenter, 2017)



Higher Risk Populations



- Older Canadian women on average are taking more prescription drugs for longer timeframes than men. They are more likely to be prescribed psychoactive and potentially addictive drugs like benzodiazepines.
- Older women are less likely to be screened for substance abuse than any other groups and symptoms of misuse often go unrecognized.
- They are also more likely to suffer from depression and anxiety.

(Basca, 2008; Gossop, 2008; Whalen, n.d.)



Hidden Risks

- Over the counter medications can interact with other drugs.
- Lack of education on how to use medications properly increases the risk of misuse and overdose.
- Older adults may be at risk of having their prescription medications stolen or withheld resulting in delirium or withdrawal.
- Inability to afford prescription medications may result in self-medication with illicit substances.
- Poor communication and health care system integration can result in older adults having multiple prescriptions that health care professionals are not aware of which could inadvertently result in misuse and possible abuse of substances.

(Basca, 2008; Benschhoff & Harrawood, 2003)