

Seniors rarely discuss their drinking with their doctors

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(HealthDay)—Plenty of seniors may struggle with problem drinking, but

a new study shows that less than half of them discuss their alcohol use with their health care providers.

"Older adults are at high risk for the harms of [alcohol use](#), especially for those with existing chronic disease and who take prescribed medications," said lead study author Pia Mauro. That makes "discussions about alcohol with providers particularly important in this population," she said. Mauro is assistant professor of epidemiology at Columbia University in New York City.

For the study, Mauro's team analyzed 2015 to 2019 National Survey on Drug Use and Health data on more than 9,600 U.S. adults aged 65 and older (51% females, 49% males) who reported alcohol use and a past-year health care visit for any reason.

Overall, 54% did not discuss their alcohol use with any provider (49% of men, 58% of women). Among those who did discuss alcohol use with their provider, more men than women were asked about drinking problems (10% versus 7%), were advised to cut down on drinking (7% versus 3%), or were offered information about alcohol treatment (2% versus 0.7%).

Men had a higher rate of past-month binge drinking (22% versus 14%) and past-year alcohol use disorder (4.5% versus 2%) than women did, the findings showed.

Chronic diseases were common among the [older adults](#) in the study: 74% had at least one chronic disease, 42% had [high blood pressure](#), 28% had [heart disease](#), 19% had cancer and 18% had diabetes. More than 35% had two or more [chronic diseases](#), according to the study published online July 29 in the journal *Alcoholism: Clinical & Experimental Research*.

Study senior author Benjamin Han said, "It is important that older adults understand that aging itself can lead to an increased sensitivity to alcohol and that certain chronic diseases can be exacerbated by alcohol use." Han is an assistant professor in the division of geriatrics, gerontology and palliative care at the University of California, San Diego.

Unhealthy alcohol use is increasing among older Americans, so it's important for [health care providers](#) to discuss alcohol use with [older patients](#), especially those with chronic diseases, Mauro said in a Columbia news release. "Normalizing discussions about alcohol use with providers in a non-judgmental way is an important step to reduce stigma and prevent potential negative health consequences," she explained.

Mauro also said the findings of gender differences "call for targeted efforts to increase alcohol use discussions among older adults and their providers."

More information: The U.S. National Institute on Aging has more about [alcohol](#).

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