



# IN SIGHT

for Oregon Lawyers

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF YOUR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE

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**OREGON ATTORNEY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**

503-226-1057  
1-800-321-OAAP  
[www.aaap.org](http://www.aaap.org)

**Lawyers Helping Lawyers**

- Alcohol & Chemical Dependency
- Career Change & Transition
- Gambling Addiction
- Mental Health
- Procrastination & Time Management

A free, nonprofit, confidential program for you.

## AGING AND ADDICTION

Carol Colleran and Debra Jay's book, *Aging and Addiction* (Hazelden, 2002), reported some very serious statistics about substance abuse among older Americans:

- Alcohol is the most harmful of all drugs. It's the drug of choice for older adults and the most damaging drug to the human body. It impacts virtually every organ system. Substance abuse and addiction are the leading health problems in the U.S.
- The U.S. House of Representatives Select Committee on Aging found that 70 percent of hospitalized people over the age of 60 were admitted for illnesses and accidents related to alcohol.
- The physical changes that occur with age, especially the slowing of the ability to metabolize substances out of the body, allow alcohol and other drugs to stay in the body longer and have a greater impact on the brain and other organs. Consequently, normal adult doses of medications – both prescription and over-the-counter – can cause dangerous side effects.
- One-third of older alcoholics suffer from late-onset alcoholism. They never had problems with alcohol or other drugs before age 55 or 60; alcoholism is triggered later in life, precipitated by increased drinking in response to life changes or losses. In other cases, older adults drink the same amount as they always have, but their aging bodies react as though they are drinking more. In each of these scenarios, the amount of alcohol becomes sufficient to trip the genetic wiring for alcoholism.
- Long-term heavy drinking causes damage to the cerebral cortex, the area of the brain responsible for abstract thinking and problem solving, verbal skills and memory, and fine and gross motor skills. A study conducted at the University of Maryland found that 10 percent of patients aged 60 and over who were diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease were actually suffering from brain damage or brain toxicity caused by alcoholic drinking.
- Consuming more than two beers or 10 ounces of wine per day was a greater risk factor for coronary artery disease than smoking.
- Half the medicines prescribed to treat illnesses caused by alcoholism interact badly with alcohol, causing even more health problems.
- Eighty-three percent of people over 65 use prescription medications, and approximately 16.9 million of these prescriptions are for tranquilizers. Tranquilizers prescribed to treat anxiety (e.g., Xanax, Librium, Valium, Ativan, and Serax) all have the potential for physiological dependence, even when taken at prescribed doses for as little as two months.
- Long-term abuse of prescription drugs can reduce life expectancy by about 15 years.
- Chemical dependency can take the young-old (active, healthy, and independent) and transform them into the old-old (suffering from illnesses and pain, inactive, and dependent) before their time.

If you have concerns about your consumption of alcohol or that of someone you care about, use this C.A.G.E. Questionnaire:

### THE C.A.G.E. QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Have you ever felt you should **cut down** on your drinking?
2. Have people **annoyed** you by criticizing your drinking?
3. Have you ever felt bad or **guilty** about your drinking?
4. Have you ever had a drink first thing in the morning to steady your nerves or to get rid of a hangover (**eye-opener**)?

Give each “no” answer a score of 0 and each “yes” answer a score of 1. A total score of 2 or more indicates a high probability of alcoholism.

Chemical abuse and dependency are devastating, costly diseases in any stage of life. Untreated, they are progressive, fatal diseases. Chemical dependency treatment is effective and should be sought at the earliest possible opportunity. It’s never too late to get help.