An Evening Gone Wrong

Evelyn's Story

Evelyn was the kind of neighbor everyone liked. She was warm, dependable, and always the first to bring food to community gatherings. At 68, she kept busy with church, her garden, and caring for her grandkids. She didn't drink much—just a glass of wine at holidays.

In the fall of 2022, Evelyn was looking forward to two things: celebrating her birthday and her upcoming retirement party.

After decades of working at the local library, she was excited about finally having more free time to travel and relax.

One evening, her friends threw her a small celebration at a neighbor's house. They brought wine and cocktails, encouraging her to "enjoy herself" since she didn't have to work the next day.

Evelyn figured a few extra drinks wouldn't hurt. But before long, she had lost count. Each time her glass was empty, someone filled it again.

As the evening went on, Evelyn began to feel unsteady and drowsy. At one point, she stumbled and nearly fell. Her friends noticed she wasn't herself, but they thought she just needed to rest. They helped her onto the couch to "sleep it off."

The next morning, Evelyn's husband couldn't wake her. He called 9-1-1, and luckily, the paramedics were able to revive her. Evelyn had almost passed away in her sleep—her body nearly unable to handle the effects of too much alcohol.

Saying "No"

If someone offers you a drink and you'd rather not, you can politely decline:

"No thanks, I'm watching my health."

"I'm taking medication that doesn't mix with alcohol."

"I'll just have some water, thanks."

Getting Help

If you or someone you know is addicted to alcohol, it's important that you get help right away.

Here are a few places you can go to learn more about alcohol abuse and addiction:

- Alcoholics Anonymous (AA): **www.aa.org**
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: **www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/BingeDrinking/**
- National Institute on Aging (NIA): **www.nia.nih.gov**

Test Yourself!

How much do you know about binge drinking? Take this quiz to find out:

1. As you age, your body becomes more sensitive to alcohol.
   a. True b. False
2. Alcohol can interfere with prescription medications.
   a. True b. False
3. It's NEVER safe to let someone "sleep it off" if you suspect alcohol poisoning.
   a. True b. False
4. Nearly _____ people die every year as a result of binge drinking.
   a. 10,000 b. 30,000 c. 50,000 d. 80,000
5. Alcohol addiction can affect older adults, not just the young.
   a. True b. False

Answers: 1. a; 2. a; 3. a; 4. d; 5. a

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BINGE DRINKING

STAY SAFE SERIES

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TOO MUCH, TOO FAST

What is Binge Drinking?

When you drink beer, wine, or liquor, alcohol enters your bloodstream and is processed by your liver. The liver can only handle about one drink per hour. When you drink more than that, alcohol builds up in your system.

For older adults, this can be especially dangerous because the body processes alcohol more slowly with age. Even small amounts of alcohol may have a stronger effect, leading to dizziness, falls, and serious health problems.

How Much is "Too Much"?

Binge drinking means having several drinks in a short amount of time. For most older adults, even two to three drinks in two hours may be considered binge drinking because of slower metabolism, medications, and age-related changes.

Binge drinking can cause:

- Dangerous falls or injuries
- Memory problems or confusion
- Alcohol poisoning
- Increased risk of hospitalization

The CDC reports that nearly 80,000 people die every year from drinking too much alcohol.

What's Your Poison?

Binge Drinking and Alcohol Poisoning

When you drink too much, your liver cannot keep up. This overload leads to alcohol poisoning, a serious and potentially fatal condition. For older adults, the risks are even higher:
The body takes longer to process alcohol. Many prescription and over-the-counter medications interact dangerously with alcohol.
Even small amounts of alcohol can cause dizziness, loss of balance, or confusion, raising the chance of falls and injury.
Warning signs of alcohol poisoning include:

- Confusion or sudden changes in behavior
- Trouble staying awake
- Slowed breathing or heart rate
- Vomiting
- Pale or bluish skin
- Seizures

Why it's so dangerous for older adults:

- Alcohol may lower body temperature, which is especially risky for seniors with circulation problems.
- Dehydration happens more quickly, leading to kidney issues or fainting.
- Alcohol can mask or worsen symptoms of heart disease, diabetes, or stroke.

Call 9-1-1 immediately if you or someone you know shows these signs. Alcohol poisoning is not something you can "sleep off." Quick medical attention can save a life.

Alcohol, Your Body and Your Health

The Long-Term Effects of Binge Drinking

Alcohol misuse doesn't just affect the moment – it can make chronic health conditions worse. Over time, regular binge drinking puts you at risk for:

- Liver disease
- Heart disease and stroke
- High blood pressure
- Diabetes complications
- Memory loss or dementia-like symptoms
- Depression or anxiety
- Greater risk of cancer

For older adults, alcohol can also interfere with prescription medications, making them less effective or dangerously strong.

Under Pressure

Binge Drinking and Your Social Life

Drinking often feels tied to socializing, whether it's family gatherings, retirement celebrations, or card games with friends. But alcohol doesn't need to be the focus to have a good time.
Instead of drinking, try:

- Hosting a coffee or tea social
- Playing cards or board games
- Attending exercise or dance classes
- Volunteering or joining a club
- Watching movies or live music

Friends Don't Let Friends "Sleep it Off"

If you notice a friend or loved one has had too much to drink, never let them "sleep it off." Older adults are at greater risk of choking, falling, or not waking up, it's critical that you get help right away. Call an ambulance, dial 9-1-1, or get in touch with a trusted adult – don't wait.

No matter what you do, though, never – ever – let a friend "sleep it off" if you suspect that they have alcohol poisoning. Try to keep them awake and moving, or get medical attention right away. If you let them sleep, they may never wake up.