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Alcohol Use Screening and Assessment

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WHY: While as many as 60% of older persons abstain from alcohol use, drinking problems are the largest category of substance abuse problems in older adults. Alcohol consumption is associated with high morbidity and mortality in middle age adults and the vulnerability of older adults to the effects of alcohol, alone and in combination with multiple co-morbidities, increases the risk for immediate and long-term harm. The National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism recommends that alcohol consumption for adults 65 and older be limited to 1 standard drink (12 oz. beer, 4-5 ounces of wine or 1½ ounces of distilled spirits) per day or seven standard drinks per week.

BEST TOOL: The Short Michigan Alcoholism Screening Instrument – Geriatric Version was developed as the first short-form alcoholism screening instrument for the elderly. A score of 2 or more “yes” responses suggests an alcohol problem.

TARGET POPULATION: Older adults who are regular users of alcohol in any amount. The goal of screening is to identify an “at risk” population of persons drinking at levels linked with negative outcomes for physical and mental health such as stroke, depression and gastrointestinal problems. Older persons taking prescription medications are at greater risk.

VALIDITY/RELIABILITY: The MAST-G, the original instrument from which this measure was derived, has a sensitivity of 93.9%, specificity of 78.1%, a positive predictive value of 87.2% and a negative predictive value of 88.9%.

STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS: The instrument serves as a screening tool only. A more comprehensive assessment for alcohol/drug dependence requires that the clinician inquire about the quantity and frequency of use, and the negative social and health consequences of each drug used, including nicotine, prescription, over-the-counter, recreational drugs and alcohol.

FOLLOWUP: Brief interventions by health care providers with older adults who are drinking at higher levels have been shown to be useful in reducing alcohol consumption by older adults. Nurses in all health care settings serving adults over 60 should screen for excess alcohol use.

MORE ON THE TOPIC:

Blow, F.C., Brower, K.J., Schulenberg, J.E., Demo-Dananberg, L.M. Young, J.P., & Beresford, T.P. (1992). The Michigan Alcoholism Screening Test – Geriatric Version (MAST-G): A new elderly-specific screening instrument. Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research, 16, 372.

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Fleming, M.F., Barry, K.L. Manwell, L.B., Johnson, K., London, R. (1997). Brief physician advice for problem drinkers: A randomized controlled trial in community-based primary care practices. JAMA, 277(13), 1039-1045.

Graham, K., Schmidt, G., S. (1999). Alcohol use and psychosocial well-being among older adults. Journal of Studies on Alcohol, 60(3), 345-351.

Tomson, Y., Romelsjo, A., Aberg, H. (1998). Excessive drinking: Brief intervention by a primary health care nurse—a randomized controlled trial. Scandinavian Journal of Primary Health Care, 16 (3), 188-192.

Short Michigan Alcoholism Screening Test–Geriatric Version (S-MAST-G)

	YES (1)	NO (0)
1. When talking with others, do you ever underestimate how much you drink?	_____	_____
2. After a few drinks, have you sometimes not eaten or been able to skip a meal because you didn't feel hungry?	_____	_____
3. Does having a few drinks help decrease your shakiness or tremors?	_____	_____
4. Does alcohol sometimes make it hard for you to remember parts of the day or night?	_____	_____
5. Do you usually take a drink to relax or calm your nerves?	_____	_____
6. Do you drink to take your mind off your problems?	_____	_____
7. Have you ever increased your drinking after experiencing a loss in your life?	_____	_____
8. Has a doctor or nurse ever said they were worried or concerned about your drinking?	_____	_____
9. Have you ever made rules to manage your drinking?	_____	_____
10. When you feel lonely, does having a drink help?	_____	_____
TOTAL S-MAST-G-SCORE (0-10) _____		
SCORING: 2 OR MORE "YES" RESPONSES INDICATIVE OF ALCOHOL PROBLEM.		

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