

Does Drug And Alcohol Abuse Make You Age Faster?



Many people, particularly middle-aged and older adults, worry about the effects of aging. The United States' aging population is rising, and American culture has long revered the preservation of energy, beauty, and vitality associated with youth.

With this, many have turned their attention to lifestyle factors that can affect the aging process, such as fitness level, adequate nutrition, and drinking and drug use habits.

Various health conditions, including substance use disorders, have been associated with premature aging, due to the effects of heavy drug and alcohol use on various systems in the body.

While the aging effects of drug and alcohol abuse can vary, understanding the full scope of long-term health complications

of heavy substance use can be an important consideration.

Aging And The Effects Of Drugs And Alcohol On The Brain

Research on the connection between aging and substance use disorders shows that heavy, prolonged substance use [can affect bodily processes](#) associated with aging.

This may be true even for those who seek recovery through a drug or alcohol rehabilitation program.

Drug and alcohol use disorders, over time, can have toxic effects on the brain that researchers believe could affect the aging process. These toxic effects include:

- changes in the brain's dopamine system
- inflammation of the brain
- lack of oxygen and nutrients reaching the brain
- changes in stress response

The effects of heavy drug and alcohol use on the brain can affect everything from a person's thoughts to their emotions, cognition, self-control, and behavior.

Chronic substance abuse has also been associated with the acceleration of age-related conditions, such as Parkinson's disease, dementia, and Alzheimer's disease.

Aging And The Effects Of Drugs And Alcohol On The Body

Substance abuse can have significant effects on the body, particularly over time with chronic use.

Chronic drug and alcohol abuse can affect a person's skin, cause changes in weight, affect a person's hormones, as well as affect the pulmonary, cardiovascular, and immune systems.

Effects of substance abuse on the body can include:

- dry skin
- sores

- dehydration
- scarring (from injection drug use)
- heart damage
- kidney and liver damage
- weight gain or loss
- malnutrition
- changes in sex drive
- irregular menstrual cycle
- ocular damage
- lung damage

Moreover, certain health conditions associated with substance abuse—such as malnutrition and organ damage—can accelerate the development of health issues linked to older age, such as brittle bones (osteoporosis), various cancers, memory troubles, and poor vision.

Who Is At Increased Risk Of Premature Aging From Drugs And Alcohol?

There are various factors that can affect a person's risk for experiencing the negative effects of drug or alcohol use.

Drinking alcohol in moderation, for instance, may not be the healthiest behavior, but it's unlikely to cause serious enough problems to speed up the aging process in the average person.

Factors that can increase the risk of [premature aging from substance use](#) include chronic substance abuse, heavy substance use, the abuse of multiple drugs, genetic factors, and co-occurring medical conditions.

Can The Effects Of Substance Use On Aging Be Reverse?

It depends. Whether the effects of substance abuse on aging can be reversed will largely depend on the duration of use, the severity of use, and other personal factors.

Drug and alcohol addiction is a progressive illness that can

have more serious effects on a person's health the longer a person struggles.

But many of the harmful effects of substance use disorders can be managed and sometimes reversed with medical and behavioral health treatment, which is offered at multiple [levels of care](#), including an inpatient rehab program or on an outpatient basis for milder cases.

Getting help for a drug or drinking problem as soon as possible is the best way to prevent negative health consequences down the road.

Sources for additional reading:

- [Methamphetamine or amphetamine abuse linked to a higher risk of Parkinson's disease](#)
- [The Graying of America: More Older Adults Than Kids by 2035](#)
- [Alcohol in the Aging Brain – The Interplay Between Alcohol Consumption, Cognitive Decline, and the Cardiovascular System](#)
- [Alcohol's Effects on the Body](#)
- [Drugs, Brains, and Behavior: The Science of Addiction](#)



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