

## The secret's out: Drug and alcohol abuse among boomers, seniors

**T**here's an alarming secret some boomers and seniors are hiding: They are risking their lives because of dangerous behavior.

Researchers at Duke University Medical Center found that nearly 25 percent of men ages 50 to 64 in a research study admitted to binge drinking (having five or more drinks within a few hours) within the past month. About 10 percent of women in that age group said they had been binge drinking. Among those 65 and older, 14 percent of men and 3 percent of women admitted to binge drinking.

The study concluded that "a surprising number of older Americans are engaging in drinking patterns that are putting their health at risk, yet these problems often go unrecognized." The danger increases for those who misuse prescription drugs.

"Some people, as they get older, their support systems shrink, so they have a limited opportunity for direct contact with others," says Jamie Bogenshutz, executive director of YES Community Counseling Center in Massapequa.

She warns loved ones of suspected drug and alcohol abusers to look for warning signs. It is especially crucial for children of widowed parents to be alert, Bogenshutz says. "When they're living alone, and they're disconnected from family and friends, that can mask the problem."

One big red flag is when that nightly phone call stops or tapers off. "If all of a sudden you're not getting a call from your mother or father, that may be a sign

that something's up," Bogenshutz says.

Other warning signals are an abundance of prescription drug bottles in the medicine cabinet. "If you got a painkiller because your knee was hurting, but your knee doesn't hurt anymore, that painkiller shouldn't be in your home," she said.

If you or a loved one need help, there are many low-cost and free options. In Nassau, call the Department of Senior Citizen Affairs at 516-227-8900. In Suffolk, call the Office for the Aging at 631-852-1420.

Others can find help at the [Nassau Alliance for Addiction Services](http://NassauAllianceforAddictionServices.org) ([nassaualliance.org](http://nassaualliance.org), 516-679-1111) or the New York State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services ([www.oasas.state.ny.us](http://www.oasas.state.ny.us), 631-434-7263).



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Signs of binge drinking among older people often go unheeded.

