



# MICAP/AADIF

Michigan Council on Alcohol Problems  
American Alcohol and Drug Information Foundation  
Mailing address: P.O. Box 10212, Lansing, MI 48901

NON-PROFIT ORG  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
LANSING, MI  
PERMIT NO. 1624



## Alcohol and Medicine: Many of Us Are at Greater Risk than We Know (Continued)

Because of the potential for serious health risks, it is especially important for anyone who is taking prescription drugs to be aware of the serious adverse consequences that can occur when drinking alcohol. The risks are real. As director of NIAAA Dr. George Koob commented on the release of this study, "Many individuals may be mixing alcohol with interactive medications and they should be aware of the possible harms."

This article was prepared by Vernon K. Smith, PhD, based on information in *NIH News*, January 2015; from the NIAAA publication, "Harmful Interactions: Mixing Alcohol with Medicines." NIH Publication 13 – 5329, Revised 2014; from W. Zhong, et al., "Age and Sex Patterns of Drug Prescribing in a Defined American Population," *Mayo Clinic Proceedings*, July 2013; and from Shinobu Suzuki, "Potentially inappropriate opioid use in Medicare Part D," presentation before MEDPAC, October 13, 2014.

## Your Gifts Make a Difference

Consider sponsoring an Issue of our MICAP/RECAP for \$1,500.00. Please phone (517) 999-0013 if you are interested. Your gift will inform State and National officials, churches and individuals about a better policy regarding beverage alcohol. As always, your donation would be tax deductible to the extent allowed under state law. Thank you.



## AADIF/MICAP

(517) 999-0013  
[info@micap.org](mailto:info@micap.org)

### Officers:

President:  
Mr. Mike Tobias  
Perry, MI

Vice President:  
Vernon K. Smith, Ph.D.  
Okemos, MI

Treasurer:  
Rev. William J. Amundsen  
Lansing, MI

Secretary:  
Mr. Richard Braun  
Allen Park, MI

### Board of Directors:

Rev. Robert Kersten  
Lansing, MI

The Rev. George Lewis  
Howell, MI

Rev. John L. Moore  
Portage, MI

Patricia A. Cook  
Laingsburg, MI

# MICAP RECAP

Volume 110, Number 2 - April 2015

A Publication of the Michigan Council on Alcohol Problems  
an American Alcohol and Drug Information Foundation Entity

## Early Alcohol Use and Addiction: Information for Parents

By Vernon K. Smith, Vice President, MICAP

For three decades, Joe Califano, former Secretary of Health and Human Services, has focused on prevention and treatment of addictions, including alcohol. In the 2014 edition of his book "How to Raise a Drug-Free Kid," Califano writes that "The most important thing I've learned is this: Whether your child smokes, drinks or uses drugs is more likely to be determined in your living room or over your kitchen table, than in any classroom, courtroom or legislative hearing room."

A key takeaway from his book is that no one has a better chance than parents to influence a child's use of alcohol. When it comes to adolescent alcohol and drug use, being a parent who takes a strong stand is a key factor in whether a child may develop addictions as a teenager and into adulthood. How we parent can make a huge difference in many ways, of course, and the parental example is perhaps nowhere more important than in the case of alcohol. To paraphrase an old expression: "Teach your children always; if necessary, use words."

The importance of avoiding early alcohol use is underscored by data that show that the earlier a person starts drinking, the greater the likelihood of developing an addiction. According to the Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University:

- Persons who first started using alcohol or other drugs before age 15 are nearly 7 times more likely to become addicted than those who delayed their first use until age 21 or later.
- 9 out of 10 people with addiction involving alcohol, nicotine or other drugs began using these substances before they were age 18.

The age of first use is especially important because clinical research shows that the brain is still developing during adolescence. Every year that alcohol or drug use is delayed during adolescence decreases the risk of addiction. Avoiding teenage drinking literally pays dividends for decades over the rest of a young person's life.

For parents, it is sometimes hard to notice the small or even the not-so-small changes that might signal alcohol or drug use among their children. The American Academy of Pediatrics has listed warning signs to watch for

## Early Alcohol Use and Addiction: Information for Parents (Continued)

in teenagers, which may suggest possible alcohol or drug abuse (although they may be associated with other problems as well, such as depression.) The signs identified by the Academy of Pediatrics include:

- Alcohol, smoke or other odors on your child's breath or clothing, or their friends
- Obvious intoxication, dizziness or bizarre behavior
- Arguments, sudden mood changes and unexplained violent actions
- Changes in dress and grooming
- Changes in choice of friends
- Changes in eating and sleeping patterns
- Sudden change in weight, either gain or loss
- Loss of interest in usual activities or hobbies
- School problems such as poor grades, poor attendance or discipline problems
- Trauma or frequent injuries
- Runaway and delinquent behavior
- Depressed mood or talk about depression or suicide; suicide attempts

In today's society, where it is easier than ever for teenagers to access alcohol and where teens face great pressure to use alcohol and drugs, it has never been more important for all of us to help provide information to parents and children about the lifelong consequences of alcohol use.

Sources: Joseph A. Califano, *How to Raise a Drug-Free Kid*, 2014; Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University, [www.casacolumbia.org/](http://www.casacolumbia.org/) accessed 3/15/2015; American Academy of Pediatrics. "Substance Abuse Prevention," 2009.

## Public Policy Alerts for MICAP Members

By providing MICAP your email address, MICAP will be able to get time sensitive information to you quickly. Members' emails will be entered into a listserv to receive public policy alerts and other timely information. For instance, when a hearing of importance to members is announced, a policy alert will be emailed so that members may contact legislators on the house regulatory committee. This will allow for more voting citizens to let their legislator know that they either support or oppose any type of legislation that may directly impact citizens either positively or negatively.

Please email your email address to [info@micap.org](mailto:info@micap.org) to get on this listserv. Email privacy will be maintained and no information will be sold for any purpose. Thank you for your help in getting the MICAP word out on these important issues.

## Alcohol and Medicine: Many of Us Are at Greater Risk than We Know

By Vernon K. Smith, Vice President, MICAP

Over 40 percent of American adults who drink alcohol are using medications that interact negatively with alcohol, placing them at risk of serious complications and dangerous health effects, according to a new study published in the February 2015 issue of *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research*.

Older Americans are twice as likely to be at risk, with almost four out of five U.S. adults age 65 or older who drink alcohol reporting that they are taking medications that are known to interact negatively with alcohol.

The primary medications that interact negatively with alcohol are allergy medications, blood pressure drugs, heart medications, sleeping pills, pain medications, muscle relaxers, cough medications, diabetes medications, cholesterol medications, antidepressants and antipsychotic medications.

A large proportion of Americans are taking these drugs. For example, a 2013 study published by the Mayo Clinic estimated that 13% of Americans were using antidepressants and 12% were using opioid analgesics. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported that in 2012, there were 259 million prescriptions for painkillers and over one-third of Medicare Part D enrollees used a prescription opioid.

Older adults are more likely to be taking prescribed drugs in general, because they have a greater likelihood for chronic conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure and high cholesterol. As a result, they are more likely to be taking medications that interact negatively with alcohol. In addition, alcohol remains longer in an older person's system because the body is less able to break down alcohol as we age, and the same is true of prescription drugs.

This study indicates that drinking alcohol while taking these prescription drugs can result in adverse health consequences that can be quite serious, including internal bleeding, difficulty breathing and heart problems. Other reactions from drug interactions can include nausea, headaches and the loss of coordination. These reactions can occur even when alcohol and medicines are not taken at the same time.

Alcohol is like some medications, in that both can make people feel sleepy, drowsy or lightheaded. The effects are exacerbated when the two are combined. At the very least, taken together they will make it harder for people to concentrate or do any task that requires clear thinking or coordination. Alcohol and drugs can also lead directly to falls, accidents and serious injuries that can literally be life threatening. These effects occur among persons of any age, but the effects can be greater among older adults.

The lead author, Rosalind Breslow, PhD, an epidemiologist at the National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), which is part of the National Institutes on Health, told the *NIH News* that "Our findings show that a substantial percentage of people who drink regularly could be at risk of harmful alcohol and medication interactions. We suggest that people talk with their doctor or pharmacist about whether they should avoid alcohol while taking their prescribed medications."

The study was based on data from over 26,000 adults ages 20 and older who responded to the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (1999 – 2010) and provided information about the use of alcohol in the past year and the use of prescription drugs in the past month. It was one of the first studies to report on the share of adults in the U.S. who drink who are also taking drugs that interact negatively with alcohol.