

Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5): AUD Criteria and Older Adults Who Drink

Resource summary: This tool summarizes physical, cognitive, and social aspects of aging to consider when using DSM-5 diagnostic criteria to assess and diagnose AUD in older adults.

DSM-5 Criteria and Older Adults Who Drink

DSM-5 CRITERIA FOR AUD ¹⁴⁴⁶	CLINICAL CONSIDERATIONS ^{1447,1448,1449}
Criterion A1	Older adults may need less alcohol to feel physical effects. Cognitive impairment can make it hard for older adults to keep track of their drinking.
Criterion A2	No special considerations for older adults.
Criterion A3	Effects of alcohol can result from drinking even small amounts, so relatively less time may be spent getting and drinking alcohol and recovering from using it.
Criterion A4	No special considerations for older adults.
Criterion A5	Older adults may have different role responsibilities because of life-stage changes, such as retirement. Role responsibilities more common in older adulthood include caregiving for a spouse or another family member, such as a grandchild.
Criterion A6	Older adults may not realize that social or interpersonal problems they are experiencing are connected to their alcohol use.
Criterion A7	Older adults may take part in fewer activities generally, making it more difficult to discover when drinking is causing them to withdraw from activities.
Criterion A8	Older adults may not understand that their alcohol use is hazardous, especially when they are drinking the same as or less than before. In addition, older adults may not realize the physical dangers of drinking in certain situations (e.g., before using a step stool).
Criterion A9	Older adults experiencing physical or psychological problems may not realize that drinking could be a factor.
Criterion A10	Changes in tolerance occur because of increased sensitivity to alcohol with age. Previously manageable quantities of alcohol may cause greater impairment.
Criterion A11	Withdrawal symptoms in older adults can last longer, be less obvious, or be mistaken for age-related illness.

Comorbidity Alcohol Risk Evaluation Tool (CARET)

Resource summary: The CARET screens for at-risk drinking in older adults by pairing quantity and frequency of drinking with specific drinking behaviors, use of medications, and co-occurring conditions in the past 12 months. For more information about the items in the CARET and how to score them, please see Barnes et al., 2010.¹⁴⁵⁰