

Over 40 and Addicted?
It's Never Too Late
to Get Help



SILVER RIDGE

A PREMIER PROGRAM BY PYRAMID HEALTHCARE

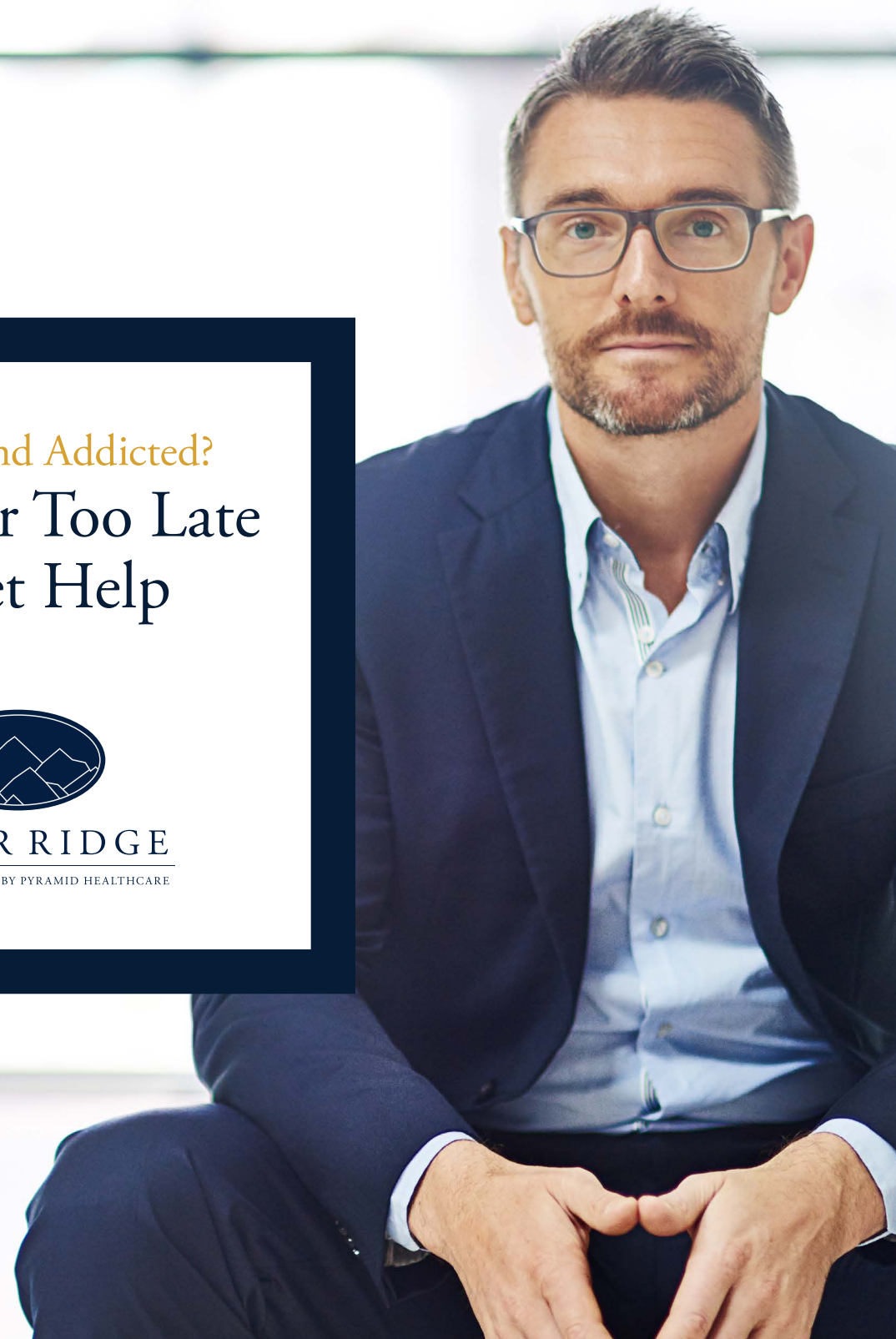


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Introduction

As the baby boomer generation ages, the rate of addiction among older adults is increasing. While young people between the ages of 18 and 25 have the highest rate of addiction, the National Survey on Drug Use and Health found that around 2.3 million adults over the age of 40 needed treatment for a substance use disorder in 2015.¹ By 2020, that number is projected to reach 5.7 million.

Whether you recently left your thirties or you're headed toward 90, living with a substance use disorder decreases your quality of life. It can cause far-reaching problems. But older adults are the least likely demographic to seek treatment for an addiction. One of the most common reasons why is that they worry that treatment won't work for them. Especially for those who have been addicted for years, the substance abuse has likely become

such an integral part of life that many can't imagine an existence without drugs or alcohol.

And indeed, the longer you nurse an addiction to drugs or alcohol, the more challenging recovery can be. That's because addiction affects your thought and behavior patterns. It leads to dysfunctional ways of thinking and behaving, and these shape your view of yourself, your relationships, the addiction and the world. They can take a devastating toll on your quality of life.

If you have a long-term addiction, you're likely to be generally unhappy with your life. You may suffer from anxiety or depression and lack energy and enthusiasm. You may have deeply rooted relationship problems with your significant other or others in your household. Legal or financial problems may be causing you intense stress. Physical and mental health problems may begin to take a serious toll on your sense of well-being.

No matter how many years you've been on this earth, treatment for addiction can help you work through these complex problems and issues. And no matter how many or how few years you have left, treatment can help you make them the best years of all.





Why Can't You Quit
on Your Own?

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Due to the negative consequences of addiction, it's likely that you've tried to quit but can't seem to muster the willpower it takes to combat intense cravings. Or maybe you've successfully quit one or more times but ended up relapsing for one reason or another.

Failed attempts at quitting can deliver a major blow to your self-confidence. It can lead to false beliefs, such as that you can't quit or that you're weak. It can lead to feelings of guilt, shame, hopelessness and worthlessness. These beliefs and feelings only serve to make everything—often including the addiction—much worse.

The truth is, overcoming an addiction is extremely difficult without help. The National Institute on Drug Abuse stresses that willpower and good intentions are rarely enough to overcome an addiction for good.² Professional help is almost always needed. This is especially true with a long-term addiction.

Treatment works for most people who engage with it for an adequate period of time. Whether you're high-functioning despite your substance abuse or you're well on your way to hitting rock bottom, it's never too late to get help to end an addiction. Not only that, but getting professional help can dramatically improve your life on all fronts.



Understanding
A Substance Use Disorder

To understand how treatment works, it's important to understand substance abuse, addiction and dependence. These terms are not synonymous, although they're often used interchangeably.

Substance Abuse

Substance abuse is the act of using a substance in a way that causes problems in your life. These may include:

- Legal issues
- Financial problems
- Relationship troubles
- Physical or mental health problems
- Problems at work or school
- Engaging in dangerous behaviors, such as having unprotected sex or driving under the influence

Binge drinking is the most common form of substance abuse. Binge drinking is defined as drinking enough in the space of two hours to bring your blood alcohol level up to .08 percent. For women, this is generally four drinks. For men, it's usually five.

Use of a prescription medication in a way other than as prescribed and any use of illegal drugs are also common forms of substance abuse.

While substance abuse isn't the same thing as addiction, it can lead to addiction.



Addiction

Addiction is characterized by using a substance compulsively despite the problems it causes in your life. It's widely considered by the medical community to be a chronic disease—like diabetes or heart disease—that requires medical attention.

Addiction changes the structures and functions of the brain, and this affects your thought and behavior patterns. Powerful changes in the memory, reward and learning systems of the brain lead to intense cravings. Ironclad connections in the brain between the substance abuse and the pleasure it produces lead you to compulsively seek out and use the substance at all costs. The mechanisms that drive us to preserve our lives by eating and procreating are the same ones at work here, and they're extremely powerful.

As you develop an addiction, you develop destructive patterns of thought and behavior. You develop false beliefs about yourself and the addiction. This is why it's so easy to live in denial that there's a problem, even when others try to intervene.

Recovery is largely about identifying those harmful patterns of thinking and behaving and developing healthier thought and behavior patterns. It's about developing skills, strategies and techniques for overcoming cravings, coping with stress, having fun and taking good care of yourself.

Dependence

Dependence is a physical reliance on drugs or alcohol. It's characterized by withdrawal symptoms that set in when you quit using a substance. Dependence occurs when the brain changes the way it functions chemically in order to compensate for the presence of drugs or alcohol.

At some point, brain function may reach a tipping point. It will begin to function more comfortably when the substance is present than when it's not. Then, when the substance is withheld, chemical function rebounds and causes the onset of withdrawal symptoms. These can range from mild to intense, depending on the substance and a number of other factors.





Diagnosing a Substance Use Disorder

Substance abuse, addiction and dependence are currently diagnosed under the umbrella of a substance use disorder. Depending on the number of diagnostic criteria you meet, the SUD will be classified as mild, moderate or severe. Treatment can help prevent a mild SUD from becoming worse, or it can help you recover from a moderate or severe SUD for the long-term.



Why Older Adults

May Become Addicted



An addiction almost always has one or more underlying causes. The most common of these include:

- A history of trauma
- Chronic stress
- Mental illnesses like depression and anxiety
- Family dysfunction

But midlife and aging adults have a number of risk factors for addiction that aren't as common in younger people.

Difficult Life Changes

As we age, we're more likely to begin experiencing difficult life changes, including loss. Our parents are nearing the end of their lives, and we may begin to lose other family members and friends to illness. Changes in marital status can also contribute to substance abuse and addiction. The divorce rate among the 50 and older crowd has doubled since 1990, and widowhood can leave midlife men and women without an anchor.

Retirement is another life change that can lead to substance abuse. Many people who leave the workforce develop feelings of isolation and boredom. They may feel useless and purposeless. A lack of structure, a loss of social support in the workplace and too much time to fill can lead some people to turn to drugs or alcohol to fill the empty hours.

Health Problems

Chronic illness can lead to isolation, loneliness and boredom and a lower sense of well-being. It's not uncommon for people to turn to drugs or alcohol to cope with poor health or a loss of mobility as they age. Additionally, older adults who are prescribed painkillers or sedatives may develop an addiction to or dependence on those medications.

Mental Illness

Thirty percent or more of older adults have a primary mood disorder like anxiety or depression.³ Women are more likely than men to suffer from depression as they age, but both men and women in older age groups report feelings of depression prior to drinking alcohol. It's common for people with anxiety, depression and other mental health problems to self-medicate with drugs or alcohol.

Physiological Changes

Our bodies change as we age, and some of these changes can increase the risk of addiction. For example, alcohol is metabolized more slowly in older people. This means that their blood alcohol content may be elevated for a longer period of time. Midlife and older adults also have less body water than young people, and they often have an increased sensitivity to alcohol. An age-related decrease in tolerance can lead to smaller doses of drugs or alcohol having a greater effect.





Treatment Is About
Improving Your Life

Treatment isn't just about sending an addiction into long-term remission, although that's the end goal. But to reach that goal, a range of complex issues must be addressed. This involves delving into the underlying causes of the addiction, addressing problems across life domains and examining faulty patterns of thinking.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services stresses that successful addiction treatment is a holistic endeavor.⁴ A high-quality treatment program will address issues of body, mind and spirit. A personalized treatment plan will address all of an individual's needs, such as those related to:

- Employment
- Education
- Legal issues
- Financial problems
- Relationship troubles
- Parenting issues
- Medical and mental health problems
- Spirituality

There is no single pathway to recovery, but successful recovery depends on making healthy, informed choices that support a life of abstinence. It depends on finding purpose and meaning in life apart from drugs and alcohol. Healthy, supportive relationships that provide friendship, hope and love are essential during recovery, and so is a safe, stable place to live.

Through a variety of therapies, treatment helps you improve your life in countless ways.



Treatment Therapies
for Midlife Adults

A range of traditional and complementary therapies in treatment provide a balanced, holistic and positive approach to recovery.

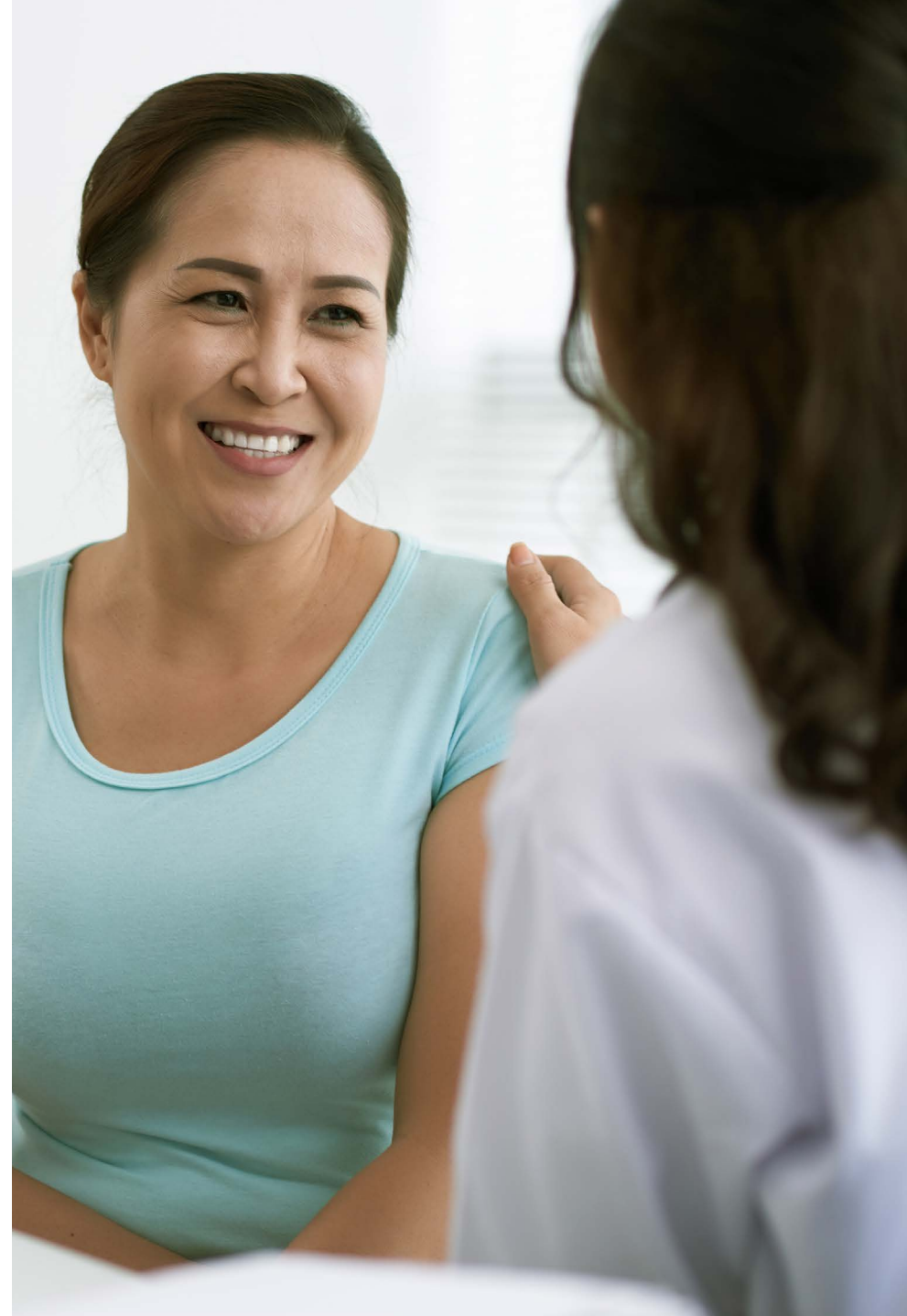
Traditional Therapies

Traditional therapies are those that have been long-used and proven successful through a large body of research. **Common traditional therapies used in treatment include:**

Cognitive behavioral therapy, the cornerstone of addiction treatment. Cognitive-behavioral therapy helps individuals evaluate their thought patterns, attitudes and beliefs and identify those that are self-destructive and counterproductive. They learn to replace harmful ways of thinking and behaving with healthier thoughts and behaviors.

Motivational interviewing, which helps people find their own personal reasons why they want to quit using drugs or alcohol. Along with improving motivation, motivational interviewing helps increase a client's level of engagement in treatment.

Group therapy, during which participants share their stories, work through their issues and get support from peers going through similar circumstances.



Psychoeducational groups, which are designed to educate individuals about substance abuse and addiction. This information helps them better understand the mechanics of addiction, remission and relapse.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration cites a number of benefits of psychoeducational groups, including helping clients to:⁵

- Move out of denial and increase their commitment to treatment
- Identify and understand the impact of addiction on their lives
- Develop intrinsic motivation to recover
- Recognize the challenges of recovery and develop the skills and strategies needed to overcome them
- Identify helpful recovery resources in the community
- Develop essential relapse prevention strategies to cope with stress, cravings and other triggers

Psychoeducational groups for family members of an addicted individual help family members understand their loved one's addiction and identify their own unhealthy coping behaviors that may be contributing to the addiction. This type of education helps families better support their loved one in recovery.

Family therapy to help restore function to the family system. Addiction is a family disease that affects how family members interact with one another. Family therapy helps repair damaged relationships, rebuild trust and improve communication among family members.

Nutritional support to help individuals understand how nutrition can help repair the damage done by chronic substance abuse. It helps them maintain a healthy weight and manage health problems like diabetes. Good nutrition improves overall health, which is an important factor for successful recovery.



Complementary Therapies

Complementary therapies add another dimension to treatment by addressing spiritual well-being and promoting a higher level of self-awareness. Although complementary therapies are relatively new to treatment protocols, they've been shown to be effective for improving treatment outcomes.

Some complementary therapies, like art and nature therapy, are experiential and involve hands-on activities that help clients work through a range of issues. Others, like yoga and meditation, are rooted in Eastern philosophies and are more spiritually focused.





Common complimentary therapies used in quality treatment programs include:

Meditation, which is becoming an increasingly mainstream practice. Meditation has been shown through considerable research to improve your ability to focus. It can even change how external events affect you. A recent study by MIT and Harvard University found that practicing meditation helps you control your alpha brain waves to produce a state of relaxation.⁶ Meditation not only reduces stress but also helps your body learn to respond better to stress in the future.

Art therapy, which helps individuals express difficult emotions and work through troubling experiences. Art therapy also helps reduce stress and improve self-awareness.



Yoga, which helps promote physical and mental strength, balance and flexibility. It also reduces stress, improves body awareness and promotes mindfulness.

Acupuncture, an ancient Eastern practice that releases feel-good brain chemicals and promotes a healthy immune system. Acupuncture also reduces stress, eases fear and promotes relaxation.⁷

Nature therapy, which can involve outdoor experiences like gardening, hiking, camping or other adventures. Nature therapy helps people work through their own unique issues. It helps them discover their strengths and improve self-confidence. Working together with others in nature has been shown to improve communication and coping skills. A study published in the *Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment* found that nature therapy also helps reduce relapse rates, ease cravings and reduce the frequency and intensity of negative thoughts.⁸

The wide variety of traditional and complementary therapies used in addiction treatment helps people change from the inside out. Through therapy, you can learn a great deal about yourself and develop a higher level of self-awareness, self-esteem and self-confidence to help you in the early weeks and months of recovery and beyond.

A middle-aged man with short, graying hair and a friendly smile is wearing a blue and white checkered button-down shirt. He has his arms crossed and is wearing a silver watch on his left wrist. The background is a bright, out-of-focus indoor setting with large windows. A dark blue rectangular box with a white interior is overlaid on the lower part of the image, containing the text "Treatment Works".

Treatment Works

Those who stay in treatment for an adequate period of time and engage fully with their treatment plan are very likely to achieve successful long-term recovery. Treatment improves your life in many ways and can bring peace and joy back into the mix.

It's never too late to get help for a substance use disorder. In the process, you'll work to find purpose and meaning in life again. You'll learn how to have fun and relax without drugs or alcohol. You'll restore your physical, mental and spiritual health.

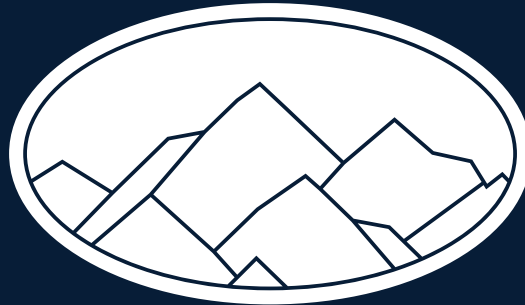
From where you sit now, it may be hard to imagine what life will be like without drugs or alcohol. How will you cope? How will you relax? How will you have fun?

There's a reason people in recovery live "one day at a time." Worrying about what the future will bring is an exercise in futility. You shape your future by living in the present moment and making choices that bring positive results.

By resolving your complex issues, changing your way of thinking and living in the present moment, you can transform your life. And once you're on the recovery side of things, chances are, you'll have a hard time imagining wanting to use again.

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Silver Ridge serves established midlife adults who need to retreat discreetly from their daily lives. Here, we provide the perfect setting to focus on the addictions compromising your relationships, your future and your legacy.

Every great legacy has a strong foundation. Build yours here.