

# **MEDICINES AND ALCOHOL**



Both alcohol and medications are different kinds of drugs and each affect your body in different ways. Because of this, having both alcohol and medication in your system at the same time can be dangerous. Most people will be on medications at one time or another in their life. This is why it is important to know how alcohol can interfere with your medications.

With most medications that interact with alcohol, you do not have to avoid alcohol completely. However, the amount of alcohol you drink does need to be adjusted to avoid any serious and potentially dangerous outcomes.

## **The Golden Rule**

Many medications can have the potential to make you drowsy and/or increase the effects of alcohol. Always be aware of this when mixing medications and alcohol before driving any motor vehicle or operating machinery.



## **What can happen if Alcohol mixes with medication?**

Interactions between medications and alcohol will be different for everybody. Remember that alcohol stays in the body for several hours, so interaction with medications can occur at anytime. Alcohol will affect different people in different ways, especially when other medicines are involved.

Some of the different medications that can interact with alcohol, and the potential outcomes include:

### **Sleeping tablets, Anti-anxiety & Anti-depressants**

Risk: Increased drowsiness/dizziness

What can happen: Increased risk of falls, especially in the elderly.

### **Blood pressure, Cholesterol and Medications for the Heart**

Risk: Decreased effectiveness of the medications, increasing risk of heart disease/stroke.

What can happen: Damage to the heart muscles and increased risk of stroke. Excessive drinking can also raise blood pressure and triglycerides (fats that circulate in your bloodstream)

### **Diabetes Medication**

Risk: Hypoglycaemia (low sugar levels) or flushing, which is associated with the dilation (widening) of blood vessels, rapid heart beat and low blood pressure.

What can happen: Coma or potentially death.

### **Antibiotics**

Risk: Affects the body's natural ability to heal itself.

What can happen: It will take you longer to recover.

(There are specific antibiotics, i.e. metronidazole and tinidazole, which have specific interaction requirements that require alcohol to be avoided during treatment and for a certain period afterwards, usually 24 hours.)





### **Anti-inflammatory medications**

Risk: Increased risk of stomach irritation and bleeding

What can happen: Stomach ulcers (small holes in your gastrointestinal tract, which can cause severe pain and other complications).

### **Strong pain medications – Opioid painkillers, e.g. morphine, oxycodone**

Risk: Increased drowsiness and greater sensitivity to alcohol

What can happen: Drowsiness can affect reaction times and ability to drive a vehicle.

### **Cold & Flu, travel sickness and allergy medications**

Risk: Increased drowsiness and/or increased affect of alcohol.

What can happen: Drowsiness can affect reaction times and ability to drive a vehicle.

## **How will I know if my medication interacts with alcohol?**

If you do not know how your medication will react with alcohol, it is best to talk to your doctor, pharmacist, or health care professional. They will be able to tell you what the safe amount of alcohol is when you are using a particular medication.

## **What if I have more than one medication?**

If you, or someone you know, is taking more than one medication (including non-prescription and herbal), it may be helpful to have a Home Medicine Review. The Home Medicine Review is a program that helps people use medications safely. Your GP will write you a referral to a local pharmacist who will visit you in your home and discuss your medications with you, make sure they are still relevant to your needs, and see if there are any possible problems when taking different medications together. The pharmacist then writes a report to your GP who then discusses with you any changes to your medications that are needed. The Home Medicine Review is particularly useful for people who take more than five medications, see more than one doctor or specialist, are confused or worried about their medications, or forget to take their medications. For more information on the Home Medicine Review program, call the Western Australia General Practice Network (WAGPN) on 9472 2922.

## **Useful Contacts**

### **Western Australia General Practice Network (WAGPN)**

Phone: (08) 9472 2922

Website: [www.wagpnetwork.com.au](http://www.wagpnetwork.com.au)

### **Australian General Practise Network (AGPN)**

Phone: (02) 6228 0800

Website: [www.agpn.com.au](http://www.agpn.com.au)



For more information on this subject or any other **drug and alcohol** or **Indigenous health** related issues please contact us on (08) 9227 9032, or toll free on 1800 246 655

For information on issues specific to **women's health** or **mental health issue** please contact us on (08) 9227 8122, or toll free on 1800 998 399