

## Alcohol and Medications



Since the liver is responsible for metabolizing alcohol and drugs, potentially dangerous alcohol-drug interactions can occur in both light and heavy drinkers. If you take prescription or over the counter medications, ask

your health care provider for advice about alcohol intake. Recognize that even herbal medicines and supplements can have adverse interactions with alcohol.

In fact, alcohol can alter the way medicines work and often **blocks or decreases their therapeutic action.**

Thus, most antibiotics are less effective when taken with alcohol, and may exacerbate nausea.



Many cold and allergy medications, over the counter painkillers and vitamins can come in a **time release** form. It is important to know that alcohol dissolves the coating, releasing the full dose immediately instead of being properly delayed.

**Aspirin/Excedrin** increases the stomach's absorption of alcohol, particularly when taken an hour or so before drinking. If anything, it **increases** the odds of a hangover. It can also cause irritation to the stomach lining, which may cause gastrointestinal pain or bleeding.



## Alcohol and Cannabis

Cannabis is not strictly a depressant as it can have both depressant and hallucinogenic effects. When used in combination with alcohol, it can decrease alertness and motor and intellectual skills

## Alcohol and Opiates

When alcohol is taken with opiates, such as morphine, heroin, codeine, pethidine or methadone, there can be an increase in the CNS depressant effects of these drugs.

Approximately one in four opiate deaths involve a combination of opiates and alcohol

## Remember . . .

**Mixing alcohol and other drugs puts you at risk for dangerous reactions. Protect yourself by avoiding alcohol if you are taking a medication and don't know its effects. NEVER mix alcohol with other drugs.**

ALCOHOL, TOBACCO, AND OTHER DRUGS PROGRAM

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# Harmful Interactions: Mixing Alcohol with Other Drugs



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## Did you know . . .

- Alcohol and medicines can interact harmfully even if they are not taken at the same time
- Women and older people are at higher-risk for harmful alcohol-medication reactions
- Certain medications contain up to 10 percent alcohol. Cough syrup and laxatives have some of the highest alcohol concentration.
- Some drugs contain more than one ingredient that can react with alcohol.
- Government reports rank alcohol-drug combinations as the leading cause of drug-related deaths in the United States, and have for decades.

## Alcohol + Stimulants = Masking Effect



Up isn't always the opposite of down. Alcohol and stimulants DO NOT cancel each other out.



This includes stimulants such as cocaine, amphetamines, and even energy drinks (Red Bull) added to alcohol beverages.

Stimulants temporarily mask the depressant effects of liquor, giving drinkers a false sense of security without improving coordination or concentration, or driving skills, or ANY EFFECT on BAC for that matter.

Therefore, users may drink more than they normally would because their brain is not getting signals there is too much alcohol. Keep in mind, when the body has too much alcohol, it begins to shut down often resulting in getting sick or passing out. When a stimulant is present in the system, it prevents the body from reacting to prevent too much alcohol consumption. Thus, users have an increased likelihood of an alcohol emergency.



Also, users are more susceptible to dehydration because both alcohol and caffeine are diuretics.

**Cocaine and Alcohol:** The body converts the breakdown products of cocaine and alcohol into a different chemical, **cocaethylene**, which is twice as deadly as cocaine is by itself.



Remember: stimulants do not provide users with extra energy, instead it uses up the bodies energy which results in the "crash" afterward.

## Alcohol and other Depressants

Alcohol and "downers" compete for the same system of liver enzymes that break down drugs and flush them from the body and BOTH increase CNS depression.



This causes a **Synergistic Effect** which means the effect of the drugs taken together is greater than the effects they produce alone. Therefore, when more than one depressant drug is taken, the depressant effects are multiplied resulting in severe drowsiness and depressed cardiac and pulmonary functions, which can be fatal. Therefore, this combination has a high risk of overdose and death.



Specifically . . . .

### ***Benzodiazepines (Xanax, Valium, etc.)***

Alcohol increases the rate of absorption of benzodiazepines and can intensify the CNS depressant effects. The most prominent of these effects are sedation, impaired reaction time and coordination, and memory loss. The risks associated with tasks involving fine motor coordination and concentration, such as driving a vehicle and handling or operating machinery, are increased. The risk can be heightened because the user may be unaware of being affected.

### ***Barbiturates (phenobarbital, etc.)***

When alcohol and barbiturates are taken together, they can seriously exaggerate the CNS depression, resulting in impairment of coordination and driving ability. The potential for overdose is very high – this combination can lead to a reduction in the level of consciousness and suppression of vital functions such as respiration.