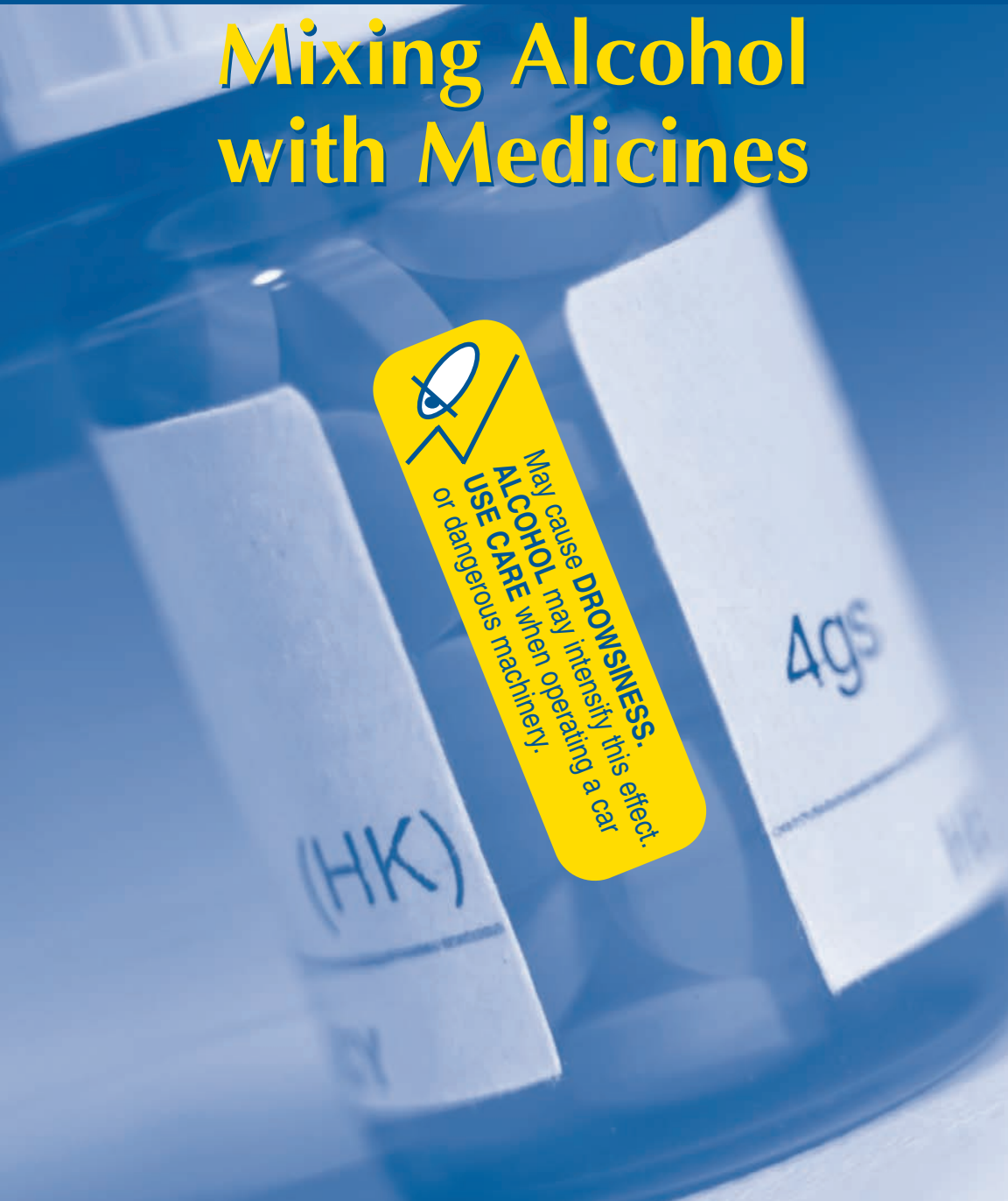
Harmful Interactions: Mixing Alcohol with Medicines



You've probably seen this warning on medicines you've taken. The danger is real. Mixing alcohol with certain medications can cause nausea and vomiting, headaches, drowsiness, fainting, or loss of coordination. It also can put you at risk for internal bleeding, heart problems, and difficulties in breathing. In addition to these dangers, alcohol can make a medication less effective or even useless, or it may make the medication harmful or toxic to your body.

Some medicines that you might never have suspected can react with alcohol, including many medications which can be purchased "over-the-counter"—that is, without a prescription. Even some herbal remedies can have harmful effects when combined with alcohol.

This pamphlet lists medications that can cause harm when taken with alcohol and describes the effects that can result. The list gives the brand name by which each medicine is commonly known (for example, Benadryl®) and its generic name or active ingredient (in Benadryl®, this is diphenhydramine). **The list presented here does *not* include all the medicines that may interact harmfully with alcohol. Most important, the list does *not* include all the ingredients in every medication.**

Medications are safe and effective when used appropriately. Your pharmacist or other health care provider can help you determine which medications interact harmfully with alcohol.

Did You Know…

Mixing alcohol and medicines can be harmful. Alcohol, like some medicines, can make you sleepy, drowsy, or lightheaded. Drinking alcohol while taking medicines can intensify these effects. You may have trouble concentrating or performing mechanical skills. Small amounts of alcohol can make it dangerous to drive, and when you mix alcohol with certain medicines you put yourself at even greater risk. Combining alcohol with some medicines can lead to falls and serious injuries, especially among older people.

Medicines may have many ingredients

Some medications—including many popular painkillers and cough, cold, and allergy remedies—contain more than one ingredient that can react with alcohol. Read the label on the medication bottle to find out exactly what ingredients a medicine contains. Ask your pharmacist if you have any questions about how alcohol might interact with a drug you are taking.

Some medicines contain alcohol

Certain medicines contain up to 10 percent alcohol. Cough syrup and laxatives may have some of the highest alcohol concentrations.

Alcohol affects women differently

Women, in general, have a higher risk for problems than men. When a woman drinks, the alcohol in her bloodstream typically reaches a higher level than a man's even if both are drinking the same amount. This is because women's bodies generally have less water than men's bodies. Because alcohol mixes with body water, a given amount of alcohol is more concentrated in a woman's body than in a man's. As a result, women are more susceptible to alcohol-related damage to organs such as the liver.

Older people face greater risk

Older people are at particularly high risk for harmful alcohol–medication interactions. Aging slows the body's ability to break down alcohol, so alcohol remains in a person's system longer. Older people also are more likely to take a medication that interacts with alcohol—in fact, they often need to take more than one of these medications.

Timing is important

Alcohol and medicines can interact harmfully even if they are not taken at the same time.

Remember...

Mixing alcohol and medicines puts you at risk for dangerous reactions. Protect yourself by avoiding alcohol if you are taking a medication and don't know its effect. To learn more about a medicine and whether it will interact with alcohol, talk to your pharmacist or other health care provider.

Commonly Used Medicines (Both Prescription and

Symptoms/ Disorders	Medication (Brand name)	Medication (Generic name)	Some possible reactions with alcohol
Allergies/ Colds/Flu	• Alavert® • Allegra®, Allegra-D® • Benadryl® • Clarinex® • Claritin®, Claritin-D® • Dimetapp® Cold & Allergy • Sudafed® Sinus & Allergy • Triaminic® Cold & Allergy • Tylenol® Allergy Sinus • Tylenol® Cold & Flu • Zyrtec®	Loratadine Fexofenadin Diphenhydramine Desloratadine Loratadine Brompheniramine Chlorpheniramine Chlorpheniramine Chlorpheniramine Chlorpheniramine Cetirizine	Drowsiness, dizziness; increased risk for overdose
Angina (chest pain), coronary heart disease	• Isordil®	Isosorbide Nitroglycerin	Rapid heartbeat, sudden changes in blood pressure, dizziness, fainting
Anxiety and epilepsy	• Ativan® • Klonopin® • Librium® • Paxil® • Valium® • Xanax®	Lorazepam Clonazepam Chlordiazepoxide Paroxetine Diazepam Alprazolam	Drowsiness, dizziness; increased risk for overdose; slowed or difficulty breathing; impaired motor control; unusual behavior; and memory problems
	• Herbal preparations (Kava Kava)		Liver damage, drowsiness

Over-the-Counter) That Interact With Alcohol

Symptoms/ Disorders	Medication (Brand name)	Medication (Generic name)	Some possible reactions with alcohol
Arthritis	• Celebrex® • Naprosyn® • Voltaren®	Celecoxib Naproxen Diclofenac	Ulcers, stomach bleeding, liver problems
Blood clots	• Coumadin®	Warfarin	Occasional drinking may lead to internal bleeding; heavier drinking also may cause bleeding or may have the opposite effect, resulting in possible blood clots, strokes, or heart attacks
Cough	• Delsym®, Robitussin Cough® • Robitussin A–C®	Dextromethorpan Guaifenesin + codeine	Drowsiness, dizziness; increased risk for overdose
Depression	• Anafranil® • Celexa® • Desyrel® • Effexor® • Elavil® • Lexapro® • Luvox® • Norpramin® • Paxil® • Prozac® • Serzone® • Wellbutrin® • Zoloft® • Herbal preparations (St. John's Wort)	Clomipramine Citalopram Trazodone Venlafaxine Amitriptyline Escitalopram Fluvoxamine Desipramine Paroxetine Fluoxetine Nefazodone Bupropion Sertraline	Drowsiness, dizziness; increased risk for overdose; increased feelings of depression or hopelessness in adolescents (suicide)

Commonly Used Medicines (Both Prescription and

Symptoms/ Disorders	Medication (Brand name)	Medication (Generic name)	Some possible reactions with alcohol
Diabetes	• Glucophage® • Micronase® • Orinase®	Metformin Glyburide Tolbutamide	Abnormally low blood sugar levels, flushing reaction (nausea, vomiting, headache, rapid heartbeat, sudden changes in blood pressure)
Enlarged prostate	• Cardura® • Flomax® • Hytrin® • Minipress®	Doxazosin Tamsulosin Terazosin Prazosin	Dizziness, light headedness, fainting
Heartburn, indigestion, sour stomach	• Axid® • Reglan® • Tagamet® • Zantac®	Nizatidine Metoclopramide Cimetidine Ranitidine	Rapid heartbeat, sudden changes in blood pressure (metoclopramide); increased alcohol effect
High blood pressure	• Accupril® • Capozide® • Cardura® • Catapres® • Cozaar® • Hytrin® • Lopressor® HCT • Lotensin® • Minipress® • Vaseretic®	Quinapril Hydrochlorothiazide Doxazosin Clonidine Losartan Terazosin Hydrochlorothiazide Benzapril Prazosin Enalapril	Dizziness, fainting, drowsiness; heart problems such as changes in the heart's regular heartbeat (arrhythmia)

Over-the-Counter) That Interact With Alcohol

Symptoms/ Disorders	Medication (Brand name)	Medication (Generic name)	Some possible reactions with alcohol
High cholesterol	• Advicor® • Altocor® • Crestor® • Lipitor® • Mevacor® • Niaspan® • Pravachol® • Pravigard™ • Vytorin™ • Zocor®	Lovastatin + Niacin Lovastatin Rosuvastatin Atorvastatin Lovastatin Niacin Pravastatin Pravastatin + Aspirin Ezetimibe + Simvastatin Simvastatin	Liver damage (all medications); increased flushing and itching (niacin), increased stomach bleeding (pravastatin + aspirin)
Infections	• Acrodantin® • Flagyl® • Grisactin® • Nizoral® • Nydrazid® • Seromycin® • Tindamax®	Nitrofurantoin Metronidazole Griseofulvin Ketokonazole Isoniazid Cycloserine Tinidazole	Fast heartbeat, sudden changes in blood pressure; stomach pain, upset stomach, vomiting, headache, or flushing or redness of the face; liver damage (isoniazid, ketokonazole)
Muscle pain	• Flexeril® • Soma®	Cyclobenzaprine Carisoprodol	Drowsiness, dizziness; increased risk of seizures; increased risk for overdose; slowed or difficulty breathing; impaired motor control; unusual behavior; memory problems

Commonly Used Medicines (Both Prescription and Over-the-Counter) That Interact With Alcohol

Symptoms/ Disorders	Medication (Brand name)	Medication (Generic name)	Some possible reactions with alcohol
Nausea, motion sickness	• Antivert® • Atarax® • Dramamine® • Phenergan®	Meclizine Hydroxyzine Dimenhydrinate Promethazine	Drowsiness, dizziness; increased risk for overdose
Pain (such as headache, muscle ache, minor arthritis pain), fever, inflammation	• Advil® • Aleve® • Excedrin® • Motrin® • Tylenol®	Ibuprofen Naproxen Aspirin, Acetaminophen Ibuprofen Acetaminophen	Stomach upset, bleeding and ulcers; liver damage (acetaminophen); rapid heartbeat
Seizures	• Dilantin® • Klonopin®	Phenytoin Clonazepam Phenobarbital	Drowsiness, dizziness; increased risk of seizures
Severe pain from injury, postsurgical care, oral surgery, migraines	• Darvocet–N® • Demerol® • Fiorinal® with codeine • Percocet® • Vicodin®	Propoxyphene Merepidine Butalbital + codeine Oxycodone Hydrocodone	Drowsiness, dizziness; increased risk for overdose; slowed or difficulty breathing; impaired motor control; unusual behavior; memory problems
Sleep problems	• Ambien® • Lunesta™ • Prosom™ • Restoril® • Sominex® • Unisom®	Zolpidem Eszopiclone Estazolam Temazepam Diphenhydramine Doxylamine	Drowsiness, sleepiness, dizziness; slowed or difficulty breathing; impaired motor control; unusual behavior; memory problems
	• Herbal preparations (chamomile, valerian, lavender)		Increased drowsiness

Resources

MedlinePlus

A service of the U.S. National Library of Medicine and the National Institutes of Health.
http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/druginformation.html

Provides information on prescription and over-the-counter medications.

U.S. Food and Drug Administration

Center for Drug Evaluation and Research
http://www.fda.gov/cder
Phone numbers:

Main FDA for general inquiries: **1–888–INFO–FDA** (1–888–463–6332)
Drug Information: **301–827–4570**
To submit a report about Adverse Drug Reaction:
Medwatch: **1–800–FDA–1088**

Provides information on prescription and over-the-counter medications, consumer drug information, and reports and publications.

National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism

http://www.niaaa.nih.gov
Phone number: **301–443–3860**

Makes available free informational materials on alcohol use, alcohol abuse, and alcoholism.

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