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Consequences of Alcohol and Medication

Contributed by Bruce Pemberton

Many people in the United States may not be aware that both alcohol and medication can produce unpleasant side effects. In combination with one another, they can be harmful to the human body. Alcohol and certain medications work in the same areas of the brain and the body, so some mixtures greatly intensify these effects. For example, if you are taking antihistamines for a cold or allergy and drink alcohol, the alcohol will increase the drowsiness that the medication alone can cause. This makes your performance when driving or working technical equipment more at risk, and can result in unnecessary accidents. If you are taking over-the-counter painkillers, such as aspirin or Alka Seltzer, you are risking possible irritation and bleeding in the stomach and intestines as well as possible liver damage. The alcohol may interfere with the medicine, making normal dosage ineffective in fighting a disease properly. Always check with your doctor or pharmacist before drinking alcohol if you are taking any over-the-counter or prescription medications. It is extremely important to be aware of what medications alcohol interacts negatively with.

The bottom line is clear. If you are taking any medication, play it safe, don't drink alcohol. Your health matters.

The following table shows possible consequences of combining alcohol with certain types of medications. This is from the New York State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services (NYSOASAS).

Medications

Tranquilizers

E.g.. Valium, Librium, Ativan, Xanax, Miltown, Equanil

Prescription Painkillers

Narcotic analgesics such as Demerol
Darvon, Codeine

Time-Release Capsules & Coated Pills
Such as Contac, vitamins, etc.

Central Nervous System Stimulants
most diet pills, Dexedrine, Caffeine,
Ritalin, Benzedrine, etc.

Consequences when Drinking Alcohol

Decreased alertness can lead to household and auto accidents. An extremely danger when the two alcohol and tranquilizer.

Reduction of the central nervous system can lead to loss effective breathing and death.

Alcohol dissolves the coating so the full dose maybe felt immediately instead of properly delayed.

The stimulant's effect may give the drinker a false sense of alertness. It does not help an intoxicated person gain control of his movement.

Antibiotics

Some can cause nausea and vomiting (especial urinary tract infections). Some are rendered less effective.

High Blood Pressure Medication

Taking with alcohol is very hazardous as it can lower pressure to dangerous levels.

Antidepressants

A person's ability to operate normally is lessened. Certain combinations can cause blood pressure crisis.

Anticonvulsant

E.g.. Dilantin, Zarontin, Tegretol
Mysoline, Phenobarbital

The drug's ability to stop convulsions is lessened. Blood disorder side effects may be exaggerated.

Antidiabetic/Hypoglycemic

E.g.. Insulin, Diabenase, Orinase
Tolinase, etc.

Severe and unpredictable reactions. Patients taking these medications should avoid alcohol.