

# Alcohol and Medication

Know the risks

## ALCOHOL & MEDICATION – KNOW THE RISKS

Alcohol is associated with 60 health conditions including liver disease, heart disease, cancer and diabetes. To reduce the risks to your health, the Chief Medical Officer recommends that all adults should limit their alcohol intake to no more than 14 units per week spread evenly over three days or more.

As we get older, we are more likely to be taking medication. On top of which, the way we process alcohol changes - our bodies are less able to break it down and more sensitive to its toxic effects. This combination means older adults are particularly vulnerable to alcohol reacting badly with their medication.

**Older adults may therefore experience harm even if drinking within the recommended government guidelines.**

If you are taking medication for a condition, you are advised to minimise how much alcohol you drink or avoid it altogether to reduce the risks.

Prescribed and legally bought medicines will be labelled with directions on how to take/use them. If appropriate, these labels will also include warnings such as:

**DO NOT DRINK ALCOHOL  
THIS MEDICINE MAY MAKE YOU SLEEPY  
DO NOT DRIVE OR USE TOOLS**

If you have any questions about your medication, please ask your local pharmacist or your GP. Or find out more about different conditions and medications on the NHS Choices website at [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

## WHAT IS A UNIT OF ALCOHOL?

Using units to keep track of your drinking is easier than it seems. Look on bottles and cans for the number of units in a drink, or you can calculate your own with the formula below.

### HERE ARE SOME EXAMPLES

**PINT LOWER  
STRENGTH  
LAGER / BEER**

568ml (pint)  
ABV 3.8%

**2.2 units**



**CAN AVERAGE  
STRENGTH  
LAGER / BEER**

440ml  
ABV 4.5%

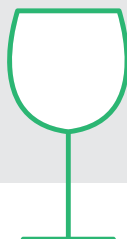
**2 units**



**SMALL GLASS  
WHITE / RED  
/ ROSÉ WINE**

125ml  
ABV 12%

**1.5 units**



**SINGLE  
SMALL SHOT  
SPIRITS**

35ml  
ABV 40%

**1.4 unit**



### FORMULA

**strength (ABV) X volume (ml) ÷ 1000 = units**

## INTERACTIONS AND RISKS

Below is a list of commonly prescribed / bought medication and how they can be affected by alcohol. The list doesn't include everything, so have a chat with your pharmacist or GP if you have any questions.

**NB:** Even if you have drunk within the legal drink driving limits, alcohol combined with medication can impair your judgement and may alter your blood alcohol levels. It's illegal to drive with prescription or over-the-counter medicines in your body if it impairs your driving.

MEDICATION GROUP	MEDICATION NAME	BRANDED EXAMPLES	POTENTIAL INTERACTION WITH ALCOHOL
<b>Sedatives</b>	DIAZEPAM TEMAZEPAM LORAZEPAM PROMETHAZINE ZOPICLONE ZOLPIDEM	Zimovane Stilnoct	Combining alcohol and sleeping medication in the body increases the effects of both drugs, increasing the risk of overdose. Other side-effects include: Feeling very drowsy*, Feeling dizzy, Memory problems, <b>Slowed or difficult breathing which can be fatal.</b>
<b>Pain Killers (paracetamol)</b>	PARACETAMOL	Panadol Anadin	Both paracetamol and alcohol are broken down by your liver, so your liver has to work harder if you take them together.
<b>Pain Killers (anti inflammatories)</b>	IBUPROFEN NAPROXEN	Nurofen Naprosyn	Mixing alcohol with these types of medication can irritate the stomach. This makes heartburn and stomach ulcers, or even gastric bleeding more likely.
<b>Pain Killers (opioids)</b>	CODEINE Combination products include:	Co-Codamol Nurofen Plus Solpadeine Max Solpadeine Plus Anadin Extra Paramol	Combining alcohol and opioid pain killers in the body increases the effects of both drugs, increasing the risk of overdose. Other side-effects include: Feeling very drowsy*, Feeling dizzy, Memory problems, <b>Slowed or difficult breathing which can be fatal.</b>
	DIHYDROCODEINE TRAMADOL BUPRENORPHINE  MORPHINE  OXYCODONE	DHC  Butrans Transtec Subutex Oranmorph MST Sevredol Shortec Longtec Oxycontin Oxynorm	
<b>Antidepressants</b>	AMITRIPTYLINE SERTRALINE FLUOXETINE MIRTAZAPINE VENLAFAXINE CITALOPRAM ESCITALOPRAM DULOXETINE	Lustral Prozac Zispin Effexor Cipramil Cipralext Cymbalta	If you suffer from anxiety or depression, drinking alcohol every day, or in large amounts, can make your symptoms worse and the medication may not work as it should. Alcohol can make you feel more drowsy and make you unsteady or dizzy, which makes it dangerous to drive or operate machinery.
<b>Anticoagulants (blood thinning medication)</b>	WARFARIN CLOPIDOGREL APIXABAN RIVAROXABAN	Plavix Eliquis Xarelto	Getting drunk or binge drinking <sup>†</sup> is dangerous while taking anticoagulants. It may increase the risk of bleeding, or having a major bleed if you fall.
<b>Antihyperglycaemics (diabetic medication)</b>	Including insulins and oral antidiabetics such as METFORMIN	Novorapid Lantus Levemir Glucophage Januvia Byetta	Alcohol can make it more difficult to spot signs of hypoglycaemia (low sugar levels).
<b>Anticonvulsants (epilepsy medication)</b>	PHENYTOIN CARBAMAZEPINE PREGABALIN GABAPENTIN	Tegretol Lyrica	Drowsiness can increase when combining alcohol with epilepsy medication. Alcohol can affect the amount of medication needed to control your condition.
<b>Antihypertensives (blood pressure medication)</b>	ACE Inhibitors e.g. RAMIPRIL Calcium channel blocker e.g. NIFEDIPINE	Tritace  Adalat	Regular long term drinking can raise your blood pressure and reduce the effectiveness of blood pressure medication.

\* Alcohol can also have a stimulant effect so some people find it initially keeps them awake and stops them going to sleep.

† Binge drinking is defined as consuming more than six units in a single session for both men and women. More information is on the NHS Choices website [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)



## ABOUT US

**Drink Wise, Age Well is a National Lottery funded programme which helps people aged 50 plus make healthier choices about alcohol as they age.**

We provide home visits, one-to-one support and group activities, as well as building resilience to help individuals and communities cope with life's stressors.

We also campaign and train practitioners, frontline staff and carers to people aged 50 plus at risk of problematic drinking.

For further information, please visit  
**[www.drinkwiseagewell.org.uk](http://www.drinkwiseagewell.org.uk)**