



EPILEPSY & The Facts

Alcohol and Epilepsy

Is alcohol harmful?

Alcohol is one of the oldest and most widely used drugs. When it is abused it can cause serious harm. The acute effects of an overdose are well known. When we are “drunk” we lose our ability to think clearly, and our ideas change about what is right and wrong. Our ability to carry out motor acts such as driving a car is markedly impaired. Many people die unnecessarily each year from both alcohol-related motor and simple overdoses of this drug. Too much alcohol is frequently associated with poor nutrition and damage to the liver, pancreas, nerves and brain can occur.

Alcohol can produce a calming affect and a sense of relaxation when taken in small doses. In many social situations its use is encouraged, and people who do not engage in “social drinking” are considered “different” or even “abnormal”.

Can alcohol itself cause seizures?

Convulsions can occur to anyone as part of delirium tremors, the withdrawal syndrome that may follow when excessive drinking stops.

Can a person with epilepsy drink alcohol?

It has been assumed that alcohol is bad for everyone with epilepsy. However, there is no clear evidence that infrequent use of small amounts of alcohol would be harmful to people with well-controlled epilepsy. However, in persons with uncontrolled epilepsy, even a small amount of alcohol may aggravate seizures and cause problems. Seizures can also be caused by missing medications when you drink, or by missing a lot of sleep.

Is it safe to drink alcohol while taking anti-convulsant drugs?

Many anti-convulsants have a degree of sedation as a side effect, which will add to the sedative effect of the alcohol consumed. This means it will take fewer drinks to “get drunk” than if you were not taking medication. If you choose to drink alcohol, you will need to know your limits and stick to them. The results of mixing alcohol with anti-convulsants also depend on which medication you are taking, and this should be discussed with your doctor.

Can alcohol affect my medication?

Alcohol can affect the rate at which certain medications are absorbed by the body. Dilantin, for instance, will be eliminated more rapidly. Alcohol may also worsen your medication’s side effects.



Should I stop taking my drugs when I drink?

NO, you should not! Alcohol is not an anticonvulsant drug, and it may even lower the seizure threshold.

What if a person with epilepsy decides to drink?

If you choose to drink, do so in moderation, and be careful not skip medications or sleep. Remember, you are subject to all the risks and dangers of alcohol consumption. Do not risk becoming dependent on alcohol in an effort to resolve the frustrations that epilepsy has caused in your life. If you find that even small or infrequent alcohol consumption causes you to have seizures, it is best to avoid drinking completely. Be particularly careful when you are starting a new medication or changing the dose of your old medication as these changes, may alter your alcohol "limit". You and your physician are the individuals most familiar with your particular case. Establish and continue a working relationship, and consult your physician for advice about using alcohol.