

## Alcohol and Epilepsy

Drinking alcohol in moderation can be an enjoyable experience. A couple of glasses of beer can satisfy a genuine thirst, while a glass of wine can be a welcome relaxant after a hard day's work. Going to the pub means contact with friends, and social life is important for everyone but unfortunately 'Binge' drinking has been getting some media of late and we have been asked a lot of questions about alcohol and epilepsy from a number of different areas such as general community enquiries as well as from people with epilepsy.

Having epilepsy and taking anti-epileptic drugs (AEDs) doesn't necessarily mean you can't drink alcohol, but it's important to bear the following facts in mind.

- AEDs can make you more sensitive to the effects of alcohol and alcohol can exaggerate some side effects of AEDs. 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.
- Drinking a lot can cause you to have 'withdrawal seizures'. These seizures may begin within seven to 72 hours of stopping drinking.
- It's important not to deliberately miss taking your AEDs because you want to drink alcohol. You're far more likely to have a seizure by missing your AEDs than by having an occasional drink.
- It is important to bear in mind that a person taking drugs which act on the brain is likely to be more sensitive to the effects of alcohol than other people. This means that rather less than the recommended amounts for activities such as driving might affect their competence. It is possibly best for the person with epilepsy not to drink alcohol before driving. At other times consumption of alcohol should be carefully monitored.



### Can alcohol cause epilepsy?

'Binge' drinking can cause a seizure, even in people who do not have epilepsy. Such seizures can be due to alcohol withdrawal, toxic effects of alcohol, too much fluid, and metabolic changes in the body. Withdrawal seizures may begin within seven to 72 hours of stopping drinking.

### So, what does all this mean?

Alcohol can make seizures more likely to occur. It can make drug side effects worse and anti-epileptic drugs can exaggerate the effects of the alcohol. Excessive or heavy drinking is likely to increase the risks of seizures and lead to other health problems.

Taken in moderation, however, many people with epilepsy will be able to enjoy an alcoholic drink. Other people will have decided that alcohol is not for them, perhaps because they don't want to take the risk, or experience has taught them that even moderate drinking can make their epilepsy worse. Remember to **Ask your doctor about the effects of drinking alcohol with the medication you have been prescribed.**

If you would like more information on Alcohol and Drug use in Epilepsy then please contact our Client Services Team on 1300 850 081

### Useful links

[www.thinkbeforeyoudrink.com.au](http://www.thinkbeforeyoudrink.com.au)

[www.alcohol.gov.au](http://www.alcohol.gov.au)

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