

Alcohol

Patient Education Module

What is alcohol?

Alcohol is a depressant drug, which means it slows down the messages travelling between the brain and the body.

Effects of alcohol

The following effects may be experienced:

Feeling relaxed	Increased confidence
Trouble concentrating	Feeling happy or sad, depending on your mood
Slower reflexes	

If a large amount of alcohol is consumed the following may also be experienced:

Confusion	Memory loss
Passing out	Blurred vision
Coma	Clumsiness
Death	Nausea, vomiting

Hangovers

The following day, the effects of a hangover may be experienced including:

Headache	Restless sleep
Diarrhea and nausea	Trouble concentrating
Tiredness and trembling	Dry mouth and eyes
Anxiety	Increased heart rate and blood pressure

Sobering up

To sober up takes time. The liver gets rid of about one standard drink an hour. Sweating it out with exercise, cold showers, coffee, fresh air and/or vomiting *will not speed up the process*. They may ease the symptoms, but they do not remove alcohol from the bloodstream any faster. This means it may not be safe to drive or work the following day.

Long term effects

Regular use of alcohol may eventually cause:

Regular colds or flu	Difficulty having children (males and females)
Difficulty getting an erection (males)	Depression
Poor memory and brain damage	Needing to drink more to get the same effect
High blood pressure and heart disease	Dependence on alcohol
Liver disease	Financial, work and social problems
Cancer	

Consuming alcohol with other drugs

The effects of drinking and taking other drugs, including prescribed medications, can be unpredictable and dangerous, and could cause:

Alcohol + cannabis = nausea, vomiting, panic, anxiety and paranoia.

Alcohol + energy drinks (with caffeine), ice, speed or ecstasy = more risky behavior, body under great stress, and overdose more likely.

Alcohol + GHB or benzodiazepines = decreased heart rate, overdose leading to death more likely.

Withdrawal

Giving up alcohol after drinking it for a long time is challenging because the body has to get used to functioning without it. Ask your doctor for help. Withdrawal symptoms usually start about 4 to 12 hours after the last drink and can last for about 4 to 5 days. These symptoms can include:

Sweating
Tremors
Seizures
Death

Delusions and hallucinations
Nausea
Anxiety, irritability, difficulty sleeping