



Identifying Alcohol and Medication Interactions

This reference guide outlines the potential severity, risk and effects of alcohol and medication interactions.

The winter season can be a time of great fun and cheer, but for some people, taking medications with one too many holiday cocktails can result in serious adverse consequences. Alcohol, diseases, and medications don't mix. Statistics show that approximately 15% of adults age 65 or older experience issues with alcohol and their medications or alcohol and their chronic disease states, with 2-4% of those elders being defined as alcoholics (1). Adding alcohol to a complex regimen of medications is a very serious medical issue that can, in some cases, lead to death. Alcohol can produce additive side effects to preexisting medication side effects making them much more severe. In many cases significant motor and cognitive impairment can occur, leading to adverse consequences, including falls, fractures, and motor vehicle accidents.

Sometimes alcohol ingestion is not intentional. Many cough syrups and other liquid cough and cold preparations contain alcohol in an amount that can cause impairment. Many of these preparations are over the counter and therefore can be obtained without the knowledge of a prescriber or pharmacist.

This Monthly Resource contains a listing of medications by therapeutic class that have the potential to interact with alcohol. The classifications can help define the severity and hopefully raise awareness and questions, if some of the effects described are noticed. As always, if there are any questions or you need help identifying a potential drug-alcohol interaction, please do not hesitate to contact one of our knowledgeable pharmacists at Remedi SeniorCare.

References:

1. Hirth V et al. Case-Based Geriatrics: A Global Approach. New York. McGraw Hill Medical. 2011. 185-86, 202-204

<i>Medication Class</i>	<i>Medication(s)</i>	<i>Severity⁺</i>	<i>Effect</i>
Antibiotics	Metronidazole, ketoconazole, INH	1 (INH =2)	Tachycardia, BP changes, GI upset, GI pain, N&V, flushing, liver damage (INH, Ketoconazole)
Anticoagulants	Warfarin Pradaxa™	3 4	Potential for serious bleeding
Antidepressants	Cymbalta™, trazodone, Elavil™, Remeron™	2	Chronic alcohol worsens depression, Impaired motor skills, ↑ toxicity, BP lability, sedation
Antidiabetics	Glucotrol™, glipizide, glyburide, Glucophage™ (metformin), insulin products	3	Flushing, headache, nausea, vomiting, tachycardia, BP lability, Hypoglycemia, weakness
Antiepileptics	Dilantin™, Topamax™,	2	Alcohol reduces seizure threshold ↑ risk of seizures, mental status changes, sedation
Antihistamines	Hydroxyzine, diphenhydramine, cetirizine, brompheniramine, loratadine	2 4	Increased drowsiness, dizziness, motor impairment
Antihyperlipidemics	Statins: Lipitor™, Pravachol™	2	Alcohol increases risk of severe liver damage when used with all statins.
Antihypertensives	Verapamil, lisinopril, metoprolol, amlodipine, HCTZ, clonidine, furosemide etc.	3	Alcohol ↑'s risk of dizziness, fainting and arrhythmias with most BP meds. ↓ clearance of alcohol (verapamil)
Antipsychotics	Abilify™, Risperdal™, Seroquel™ Haldol™, Clozaril™	2	Additive drowsiness, dizziness, impaired mental status
Anxiolytics	Lorazepam, diazepam, clonazepam, alprazolam, buspirone	2	↑ risk of overdose, sedation, dizziness, respiratory depression, temporary amnesia
Hypnotics	Ambien™, Sonata™, Lunesta™, Prosom™, Restoril™, diphenhydramine	2	Impaired motor function, ↑ drowsiness, memory impairment,
Muscle Relaxants	Flexeril™, Soma™	2 3	Impaired motor function, muscle weakness, ↑ seizures, drowsiness, dizziness, respiratory depression
Pain	Percocet™, Vicodin™, fentanyl, tramadol, Tylenol™	2	Altered mental status, respiratory depression, drowsiness, dizziness, impaired motor control, severe liver damage (Tylenol)

SEVERITY⁺ KEY:

1 = SEVERE: Alcohol contraindicated. Avoid use.

2 = MAJOR: Contraindicated in select group of patients. Further therapy and/or an alteration in therapy may be necessary to avoid or limit the potential for interaction. Monitor patient.

3 = MODERATE: Use of these medications together may result in unintended clinical effects. Alterations in therapy may be required. Monitor patient.

4 = MINOR: Use of these medications together does not usually result in clinically significant interactions. Alterations in therapy or monitoring are not usually required.

References: www.medscape.com, accessed on-line 12-14-14. Harmful Interactions: mixing alcohol with Medications: NIH Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. Revised 2014, <http://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov>, accessed 12-15-14. Clinical Pharmacology: www.clinicalpharmacology.com, accessed 1-10-2015.