Alcohol

Can I drink alcohol when I have epilepsy?

Drinking small or modest amounts of alcohol is unlikely to make you have more seizures. But moderate to heavy drinking over a short space of time can make you more likely to have a seizure. You are most at risk of having a seizure between 6 and 48 hours after you have stopped drinking.

For some people, drinking alcohol can mean they get less sleep or forget to take their epilepsy medicine. These are both things that can make you more likely to have a seizure.

How much can I safely drink?

Everyone is different, so how much someone with epilepsy can drink varies from person to person. There are no official guidelines about drinking alcohol for people with epilepsy. But if you do choose to drink, you might decide to follow the NHS guidelines about low risk drinking for everyone. These say that men and women should drink no more than 14 units of alcohol a week. You can find out more about the guidelines and alcohol units at Drinkaware.

Is it safe to drink alcohol with my epilepsy medicine?

Excessive drinking can reduce the amount of some epilepsy medicines in the body. This could make you more likely to have a seizure. Alcohol can also increase the side-effects of some epilepsy medicines. Some people say that drinking alcohol when they are taking epilepsy medicine makes them feel drunk quicker.

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The leaflet that comes with your epilepsy medicine should tell you if alcohol interacts with your medicine.

If you do drink, it’s important to keep taking your epilepsy medicine as usual. Missing a dose could make you more likely to have a seizure.

**Can alcohol cause seizures in people who don’t have epilepsy?**
People with or without epilepsy can have seizures after heavy drinking. These are known as alcohol withdrawal seizures. They are most likely to happen between 6 and 48 hours after your last drink. You could have alcohol withdrawal seizures if you are alcohol dependent and stop drinking suddenly. Signs of being alcohol dependent include a strong desire to drink and finding it hard to control your drinking.

If you think you may be alcohol dependent and want to stop drinking, it’s important to get medical advice about how to stop safely. This is to reduce the risk of seizures and other symptoms of alcohol withdrawal.

If you are not alcohol dependent, you could still be at risk of alcohol withdrawal seizures if you drink heavily over a short space of time.

Sometimes alcohol withdrawal seizures can develop into status epilepticus. This is when a seizure lasts longer than 5 minutes, and can pose more danger than shorter seizures.

**Where can I get help and advice about drinking?**
Your GP can give you advice on cutting down or stopping drinking. They may refer you to a service to help you safely reduce the amount you drink.

You can also get information and support from the following websites:
- NHS Choices
- Drinkaware
- Alcoholics Anonymous

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8 Email from J.P. Leach, 12 August 2016
About this information
This information is written by Epilepsy Action’s advice and information team, with guidance and input from people living with epilepsy, and medical experts. If you would like to know where our information is from, or there is anything you would like to say about the information, please contact us at epilepsy.org.uk/feedback

Epilepsy Action makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of information but cannot be held liable for any actions taken based on this information.

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