

Ask the expert

Q&A

How bad is it to drink alcohol while you are on medication?

In general, alcohol consumption in small amounts and on its own is not harmful.

However, when combined with medicine, even the smallest amount of alcohol can create a toxic cocktail. Mixing alcohol and medicine may change the way the drug reacts with your body and the manner in which your body breaks down and disposes of the drug.

Medicines, even those bought over the counter, are formulated and tested to be especially effective in alcohol-free blood.

Like the corrosive effect of water on metal, alcohol may interact with and even alter the chemical properties of ingredients in the medicine, turning commonly used drugs into harmful substances.

Furthermore, alcohol and most medicines are broken down in the liver. Combining alcohol with medicine may delay the breakdown of the drug by the liver, causing it to stay in the blood longer and increasing the risk of an overdose. This blend will also place undue stress on, and may even damage, your liver, a central metabolic organ.

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