

Alcohol and medication

FACTSHEET

When we get older it is more likely that we will be prescribed medication for a number of reasons.

In fact adults aged over 65 take an average of 7-10 medications each day. People can be prescribed medication for all different reasons e.g. for high blood pressure, water retention, high cholesterol. It is also used to treat anxiety and depression, as well as other mental health concerns.

As we age our metabolism and the ability of our liver to process medications can slow down so it is very important that we carefully consider how alcohol can affect some medications.

The table below lists some common types of medicines and explains some of the possible risks of mixing them with alcohol. The interaction of alcohol and medicines can be unpredictable.

ALCOHOL AND MEDICATION	
TYPES OF MEDICINE	ADVICE / POSSIBLE RISKS
Painkillers e.g. paracetamol	Paracetamol and alcohol are both broken down by the liver, therefore your liver has to work harder if you take them together. Never take more than the recommended dose of paracetamol.
Anti-inflammatory drugs e.g. ibuprofen, aspirin	These medicines can irritate the stomach, the same as alcohol and people who drink on a regular basis are more likely to suffer from heartburn and stomach ulcers. These drugs can also thin the blood therefore increasing the risk of bleeding.
Blood thinning medicines e.g. warfarin	Pay particular attention to your daily units. It is dangerous to drink over the recommended limits or get drunk while taking warfarin. Doing this may increase the risk of bleeding.
Stomach healing medicines e.g. omeprazole, lansoprazole, ranitidine	People who drink regularly are more likely to suffer from heartburn and stomach ulcers. As alcohol irritates the stomach lining, drinking it will reduce the effectiveness of these medicines.

REFERENCE

(1) Alcohol and Later Life – NHS GG&C