

How can I take extra care if I have a drink?

Clearly, too much alcohol can greatly increase the risk of having seizures. If you feel that you would like to drink alcohol in moderation there are ways you can take extra care:

- At all times you should carefully watch how much you drink
- **Do not drink any alcohol before driving** - even small amounts can interfere with antiepileptic medication and affect your driving ability
- Information with medication sometimes says it should not be taken with alcohol. However, taking your antiepileptic medication and drinking in moderation is safer than missing a dose of medication
- Remember that too much alcohol could make you more likely to forget to take your medication
- When having a drink, make sure you are still getting enough sleep and eating regularly.

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Scotland's voice for epilepsy

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Alcohol factsheet



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Alcohol

What is epilepsy?

Forty thousand people in Scotland have epilepsy. This is one in 130 people. It is the most common serious brain (neurological) condition. Anyone can develop epilepsy at any age. However, it is most common in childhood, the teenage years and later life.

Epilepsy is described as a tendency to have recurrent seizures which start in the brain. Seizures used to be known as 'fits'. They are caused by disturbances in the brain's normal activity. Some people may have one or two seizures during their life. These could be due to a high temperature or a head injury. It does not necessarily mean they have epilepsy.

Epilepsy and alcohol

Drinking alcohol in moderation can be an enjoyable way to help you relax. However, if you have epilepsy, you may need to take extra care. There are good reasons for being sensible about alcohol:

- Alcohol can interfere with antiepileptic medication. It can stop the medication from reaching the level in the blood needed to control seizures.
- It can make side effects of medication worse.
- Drinking large amounts of liquid, like beer or cider, can trigger seizures in people with epilepsy.
- Heavy drinking can lead to late nights, lack of sleep, missed meals and forgotten tablets. All of these can make you more likely to have a seizure.

Is it safe to drink alcohol if you have epilepsy?

Doctors have different opinions about whether or not people with epilepsy should drink alcohol. Some recommend that it should be avoided completely. Others say a sensible amount in most cases will do no harm. You need to make this decision based on your doctor's advice and your own wishes.

What is moderate drinking?

Moderate drinking can mean different things to different people. Drinking more than 2 units of alcohol per day can make someone with epilepsy more likely to have a seizure.

It is therefore suggested that a sensible daily limit would be 1 - 2 units of alcohol. On average, there is 1 unit of alcohol in a half pint of beer or lager, one glass of wine or one single measure of spirits. Some alcoholic drinks have higher than average alcohol content. You need to check this before deciding how much to drink.

It is also important that you don't save up your daily amount and binge drink at the weekend. Binge drinking will increase your chances of having a seizure, often during the 'hangover' period.

Some people with epilepsy prefer to have less than this daily amount or none at all.

Can alcohol cause epilepsy?

Even people who don't have epilepsy can have seizures after a period of heavy drinking. This can be for a number of reasons such as the withdrawal of alcohol or because the amount of liquid drunk was so high. In some cases of severe and long-lasting alcohol abuse, epilepsy develops as a result of brain damage. This may be caused by the effect of the alcohol on the brain or head injuries experienced when drunk.