



Factsheet:

Alcohol

Many of us like to relax with a glass of wine or a pint of beer at the weekend or after work. It can be an enjoyable way to wind down and relax. Having epilepsy doesn't mean an end to alcohol. What it usually means is that you need to think a bit more carefully about how, when and how much you drink.

Here's why:

- Alcohol can interfere with anti-epileptic drugs. It can stop your medication from reaching the level in the blood which is needed to control your seizures.
- It can also make side effects of your medication worse.
- Drinking large amounts of alcohol, especially if you drink this in a short space of time, can trigger a seizure. You don't have to have epilepsy to have a seizure after a night of binge drinking, this can happen to anyone. However, if you have epilepsy, binge drinking can trigger a seizure which could be a lot worse than your normal seizures.
- Lack of sleep, skipping breakfast, being dehydrated, and forgetting to take your medication are all part of a typical hangover. Unfortunately, they are also all classic seizure triggers. Any one of them can trigger a seizure. Being hung-over can therefore put you in real danger of having a seizure.

So, is it safe to drink alcohol?

The best thing you can do is to follow your doctor's advice on this. The patient information leaflet which comes with your medication usually tells you if you should take alcohol with your medication. If in doubt, ask your doctor. You will find that opinion on whether to take alcohol is a bit divided amongst doctors. Some think that it's best to avoid alcohol completely because of the reasons mentioned above. Others feel it's alright to drink in moderation. The final decision is of course yours, but make sure you know all the facts first.

What is moderate drinking?

It is generally accepted that two units of alcohol per day is a safe enough amount. Anything over that makes you more likely to have a seizure. Some people find that even just one drink triggers a seizure, whereas others drink a lot

more than the two units and are fine. The two units are just a guideline but it's based on official medical advice.

Make sure you know your units. One unit is usually half a pint of beer or lager, one small glass of wine or one single measure of spirits. Beware of alcoholic drinks that have a higher than average alcohol content. Check this out first before you work out your units.

Saving up your units to the weekend and drinking them all in one go is not a good idea. This will seriously increase your chance of having a seizure and could put you in danger because the seizure could be a lot worse than normal.

Can alcohol cause epilepsy?

In a way it can. Heavy drinking over a prolonged period of time can cause brain damage. This in turn can cause epilepsy. Some people also develop epilepsy following a brain injury received while under the influence of alcohol.

Five golden rules to stay safe with epilepsy and alcohol

1. **Don't drink before you drive.** If you have your driving license back (after one year being seizure free), don't spoil it by drinking any alcohol before driving. You will increase your chance of having a seizure because alcohol can make your medication less effective. A seizure means losing your license again. Apart from the fact that drinking, even a small amount, before driving can affect your ability to drive.
2. **Watch how much you drink.** If necessary, write it down, or ask a friend (ideally someone who doesn't drink) to keep an eye on how much you drink.
3. **Never skip your medication before a night out.** It's a lot more dangerous to have a seizure from not taking your medication, than having one following drinking alcohol.
4. **Never forget to take your medication after a night out.** Set your alarm, get a friend to phone you with a reminder, ask someone you live with to wake you up, do whatever it takes to make sure you take your medication when it's due. The surest way to seizure freedom is to always take your medication.
5. **Eat and drink plenty of water.** You may not feel like eating after a night out but it's important you do. Eat regularly and drink plenty of water to re-hydrate your body. That way you can reduce your risk of having a seizure.

For more help and information

Call our helpline 0808 800 2200, text 07786 209 501

Or email us at enquiries@epilepsyscotland.org.uk