

Epilepsy and alcohol

A diagnosis of epilepsy does not automatically mean you have to stop drinking alcohol. For many people, being able to have a drink with friends and family is an important part of their life. It is up to you to make an informed decision taking on board medical advice.

Alcohol, anti-epileptic drugs and seizures

Some anti-epileptic drugs do not mix well with alcohol and can increase the risk of seizures or medication side effects.

Your epilepsy specialist nurse will give you more specific information about the medication you take and any possible interaction with alcohol. The patient information leaflet of your medication will also have all the information you need to know about the medication you are taking.

You may, for example, be asked to stay off alcohol for the first few months of starting a new medication or when changing over to a different medication to maximise your chances of seizure control.

Drinking in moderation

Public health guidelines recommend drinking in moderation, which means no more than two units per day, or 14 units of alcohol per week. This is particularly important if you take prescribed medication such as anti-epileptic drugs.

Binge drinking

If you have epilepsy, drinking a large amount of alcohol in a short space of time can trigger a breakthrough seizure putting you at risk. Even people

without epilepsy can sometimes have a seizure after a night of binge drinking.

Hangover

Heavy drinking can affect the quality of sleep. You are also likely to be dehydrated and may feel nauseous the next day not wanting to eat. Sleeping in can also make you forget to take your medication or taking it much later than usual. Each of these factors are potential seizure triggers.

How to stay safe

- Watch how much you drink. Familiarise yourself with what 14 units of your usual drink look like. For example, 14 units is six pints of 4% beer or six 175ml glasses of 13% wine. Keep a tab on how many drinks you have, write it down or buddy up with a friend who will keep an eye on how much you drink.
- Never skip your medication before a night out. Having a breakthrough seizure from not taking your medication can be dangerous.
- Set an alarm on your phone to make sure you take your medication on time. If necessary, take your medication with you.
- Drink plenty of water during the night and the following morning to stay well hydrated. Try and eat something before you go out, and the next day, even if you do not feel like it. Low blood sugar or dehydration can sometimes trigger a seizure in some people.
- If tiredness is a potential seizure trigger for you and you know it is going to be a late night, try and sleep before you go out, and rest the next day to catch up on your sleep.

Can drinking alcohol cause epilepsy?

Heavy drinking over a prolonged period of time can cause brain damage, which can sometimes cause epilepsy.

Getting help

If you find you are drinking too much speak to your epilepsy specialist nurse or GP who may be able to signpost you to local alcohol addiction or counselling services. Cutting back or giving up alcohol for a while might improve your seizures.

Always seek medical advice if you are a heavy drinker and want to cut down or stop. Abruptly stopping alcohol can trigger a seizure in some people.

Further sources of information and support

- **NHS Inform** - www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/alcohol/where-to-get-help
- **Drinkline** – 0800 7314 314
- **Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)** - 0800 9177650 www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk
- **We are with you** (formerly Addaction) – wearewithyou.org.uk
- **Alcohol Focus Scotland** - www.alcohol-focus-scotland.org.uk

Our resources are always free. If you would like to support our work please text FACTS to 70085 to donate £3. Texts cost £3 plus one standard rate message.



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