



Wine mixed with medicines



Background

About 85% of Australian adults have had at least one alcoholic drink such as a glass of wine in the past 12 months – 41% of Australians drink alcoholic beverages weekly and 8% of Australians drink alcoholic beverages daily (AIHW 2008).

Approximately 50% of Australians have drunk an alcoholic beverage such as wine and taken over-the-counter and prescription medicines together.

There is a real reason for warning labels on medicines

Wine and medicine interactions can occur with as little as one glass of wine, and the effect of the interaction may differ from person to person.

The alcohol contained in wine may change the way a medicine is absorbed by the body, and the way the medicine is broken down by the

liver or vice versa. For example, the alcohol may compete with a medicine for the same liver enzymes to break it down so that the medicine is either broken down too fast or too slowly, or its breakdown is completely prevented.

This means that a blood medicine concentration may be too low to be effective, or may be too high so that unwanted mental and physical side effects occur. For example, you can have a headache, feel nauseous, vomit, feel dizzy, drowsy, uncoordinated or you can faint. You can also bleed internally, or have breathing or heart problems.

Alternatively, if the medicine is broken down preferentially by the liver, your blood alcohol concentration may be too high.

Alcohol, like some medicines, acts on the brain and can make you dizzy, drowsy or lightheaded. Drinking wine while taking these medicines can magnify these effects. You may not be able to concentrate, or may be



uncoordinated. Your risk of having an accident such as drowning, a fall or a car crash is significantly increased.

Common medicines that interact with the alcohol contained in wine include those used to treat arthritis, blood pressure, blood clots, diabetes, epilepsy and gastrointestinal ulcers as well as antibiotics, anti-histamines, anti-depressant and anti-anxiety drugs, particular painkillers and cough medicines. Indeed, cough medicines can also contain up to 10% alcohol.

References and further reading

For further information on alcohol and medicine interactions, please see:
http://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/Medicine/Harmful_interactions.pdf

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