



Fact sheet

FACTS to know about aging, alcohol, and prescription medications

Drinking alcohol when you are taking a prescription medication is a health risk for baby boomers (ages 51-69) and for older adults. Aging adults have unique health considerations that make combining alcohol and prescription medications especially dangerous.¹ And, the fact is, as you age, you are likely to take a prescription medication for one or more health issues common to aging.²

Learn more facts about the unique health risks associated with aging, alcohol, and prescription medication.

Fact 1

Alcohol interacts with many medications.³ The list of medications that alcohol can interact with is a long one—and may surprise you. For example, alcohol should not be consumed if you are taking non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) or medicines containing acetaminophen. Acetaminophen is an active ingredient in many over-the-counter and prescription medicines. It is used in pain relief medicine, fever reducers, sleep aids, and cough, cold, and allergy medicines. Other medicines used to treat moderate to severe pain may also contain acetaminophen as an active ingredient. These medicines are available only by prescription. Examples include Hydrocet, Percocet, and Vicodin. Be sure to ask your physician if your medication is on this list. Adverse effects can range from minor to deadly.

Fact 2

Prescription medications may not work as intended when combined with alcohol. Using alcohol while you are taking a prescription medication can potentially cause dangerous side effects. Alcohol also can cancel the intended effects of your medication—which can be equally as dangerous. In other words, when combined with alcohol, your medication won't work for the health issue it has been prescribed to treat or manage.

¹ [“Alcohol Use and Older Adults,” NIH Senior Health.](#)

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

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Fact 3

Older bodies are more sensitive to alcohol and medications than younger bodies.⁴ Older bodies are slower than younger bodies. When your metabolism slows down, your body may become more sensitive to the effects of medications and alcohol, and even to some types of foods. You may notice that drinking less alcohol affects you more now than when you were younger.

Fact 4

Memory issues, poor balance and coordination, and weakness can be related to medication side effects or symptoms of an alcohol-related problem, or symptoms of your medication interacting with alcohol.⁵ Drinking alcohol can make any of these health issues worse for older adults and put you at risk for falls, car crashes, and other unintentional injury.

Fact 5

“Do Not Use with Alcohol” on a medication label means that using alcohol while taking this medication can be dangerous to your health.⁵ Review your prescription medications for this warning and heed it. Ask your health care professional to review medication safety issues with you.

Fact 6

Medications linger in your body for at least several hours.⁶ This fact means that alcohol may interact with medication hours after your last dose. It’s never safe to use alcohol with a prescription medication known to interact with it.

⁴ [“Alcohol Use and Older Adults,” NIH Senior Health.](#)

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ [“Alcohol Use and Older Adults,” NIH Senior Health.](#)