Alcohol
Patient Education Module

What is alcohol?
Alcohol is a depressant drug, which means it slows down the messages travelling between the brain and the body.

Effects of alcohol
The following effects may be experienced:

- Feeling relaxed
- Trouble concentrating
- Slower reflexes
- Increased confidence
- Feeling happy or sad, depending on your mood

If a large amount of alcohol is consumed the following may also be experienced:

- Confusion
- Passing out
- Coma
- Death
- Memory loss
- Blurred vision
- Clumsiness
- Nausea, vomiting

Hangovers
The following day, the effects of a hangover may be experienced including:

- Headache
- Diarrhea and nausea
- Tiredness and trembling
- Anxiety
- Restless sleep
- Trouble concentrating
- Dry mouth and eyes
- Increased heart rate and blood pressure

Sobering up
To sober up takes time. The liver gets rid of about one standard drink an hour. Sweating it out with exercise, cold showers, coffee, fresh air and/or vomiting will not speed up the process. They may ease the symptoms, but they do not remove alcohol from the bloodstream any faster. This means it may not be safe to drive or work the following day.

Long term effects
Regular use of alcohol may eventually cause:

- Regular colds or flu
- Difficulty having children (males and females)
- Difficulty getting an erection (males)
- Depression
- Poor memory and brain damage
- Needing to drink more to get the same effect
- High blood pressure and heart disease
- Dependence on alcohol
- Liver disease
- Financial, work and social problems
- Cancer
Consuming alcohol with other drugs
The effects of drinking and taking other drugs, including prescribed medications, can be unpredictable and dangerous, and could cause:
Alcohol + cannabis = nausea, vomiting, panic, anxiety and paranoia.
Alcohol + energy drinks (with caffeine), ice, speed or ecstasy = more risky behavior, body under great stress, and overdose more likely.
Alcohol + GHB or benzodiazepines = decreased heart rate, overdose leading to death more likely.

Withdrawal
Giving up alcohol after drinking it for a long time is challenging because the body has to get used to functioning without it. Ask your doctor for help. Withdrawal symptoms usually start about 4 to 12 hours after the last drink and can last for about 4 to 5 days. These symptoms can include:

- Sweating
- Tremors
- Seizures
- Death
- Delusions and hallucinations
- Nausea
- Anxiety, irritability, difficulty sleeping