

# 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 getting an erection (males)

Poor memory and brain damage

High blood pressure and heart disease

Liver disease

Cancer

Difficulty having children (males and females)

Depression

Needing to drink more to get the same effect

Dependence on alcohol

Financial, work and social problems

## **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