

Nebraska Licensee Assistance Program

Alcohol/Drug abuse assistance for health service professionals licensed, certified or registered by the State of Nebraska

A Word of Caution About Combining Alcohol and Medications

Alcohol can cause adverse physical reactions and result in illness, injury or even death when used with many of the available prescription and over-the-counter medications and herbal remedies. Alcohol use can also influence the effectiveness of a drug by altering its availability. In other words, the amount of the medication reaching the receptor site or area to which it was meant to help is diminished when the medication is combined with alcohol. Alcohol use may also intensify the unpleasant or difficult side effects of a medication.

Some examples of medication/alcohol interactions to be aware of:

- ❖ Antibiotics – In combination with acute alcohol consumption, some antibiotics may cause headache, nausea, vomiting, or convulsions. The effectiveness of the medication may also be reduced.
- ❖ Antidepressants – Alcohol is a depressant and when combined with an antidepressant can lead to a high potential for interaction. For example, the alcohol increases the sedative effect of the tricyclic antidepressants impairing the mental skills necessary for driving.
- ❖ Narcotic pain relievers – The combination of opiates and alcohol enhances the sedative effect of both substances, increasing the risk of loss of control of an individual's faculties and even ability to function at all, including the risk of respiratory arrest.

Anyone considering drinking alcohol while also using medication should consult with their treating physician or their pharmacist prior to any drinking.

Health service professionals who are taking medications and drink alcohol against medical advice may exhibit an inability to cut back their alcohol use appropriately. If they continue to use alcohol and the alcohol exacerbates the physical or psychological problems the medication is treating, they are exhibiting another sign of alcohol dependence. If they know they should not use alcohol with their medications and persistently try to not use alcohol but their efforts to control their use are unsuccessful, they have shown another sign of alcohol dependency. Health service professionals who take medications and cannot control their use of alcohol can use the services of the NE LAP to get the treatment they need to help stop their dangerous use of alcohol.

If you are a licensed health service professional wanting more information about alcohol/drug abuse or addiction treatment or other related issues, contact the Nebraska Licensee Assistance Program (NE LAP) at (800) 851-2336 or (402) 354-8055 or visit our website at www.lapne.org. If you know of or are concerned about a colleague's or employee's alcohol/drug abuse, please contact the NE LAP for a consultation. Together, we may be able to help them to seek appropriate treatment and end the destructive effects of alcohol/drug abuse on their lives.