

NEBRASKA LICENSEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

A SERVICE OF BEST CARE EAP

Combining Medication and Alcohol Can Be Deadly

The Nebraska Licensee Assistance Program (NE LAP) continues to encounter credential holders who drink alcohol while taking medications despite multiple warnings and precautions that advise against this practice. Alcohol can cause adverse physical reactions and result in illness, injury, or even death when used with some prescriptions, over-the-counter medications, and herbal remedies. Alcohol use can also influence the effectiveness of a medication by altering its availability, causing a decreased amount of the medication to reach the area to which it was designed to treat. Alcohol use may also intensify the unpleasant side effects of a medication.

Two of the most common medications mixed with alcohol the NE LAP encounters are:

- Antidepressants/Antianxiety – Alcohol is a depressant. When alcohol is combined with an antidepressant it counteracts the benefits of the medication and potentially causes increased depression and anxiety. This causes depression and anxiety to be more difficult to treat. The mental skills necessary for safe driving are already impaired with alcohol use alone. When combined with an antidepressant, an individual's mental skills are substantially impaired, potentially resulting in accidents, with injury or death possible.
- Narcotic/Opiate pain relievers – Alone, opiate pain relievers and alcohol each slow down an individual's respiratory and nervous system. The combination of an opiate and alcohol enhances the sedative effect of both substances, increasing the risk of loss of control of an individual's faculties, and even an ability to function at all. There is an increased risk of respiratory arrest, coma, and death.

Mixing alcohol with any medication may cause the following problems or complications:

- Nausea and vomiting
- Headaches
- Change in blood pressure
- Loss of coordination/dizziness/fainting
- Abnormal behavior
- Accidents
- Liver damage
- Heart problems
- Internal bleeding
- Impaired breathing

Anyone considering drinking alcohol while also using a medication with a precaution or warning about alcohol use should consult with his/her treating physician or pharmacist prior to drinking any alcohol.

If you are taking a medication and drinking alcohol against medical advice, you may be exhibiting an inability to appropriately cut back or control your alcohol use. If you have continued to drink, and the physical or psychological problems the medication is supposed to treat have increased or become worse, this may be a sign of an alcohol use disorder.

If you are a credential holder and want to stop drinking while taking medication, you can use the services of the NE LAP. You can obtain an alcohol/substance use assessment to determine what steps are necessary to stop the dangerous practice of drinking alcohol while on a medication that warns against it. Your life may depend on it.

If you are a licensed health or health-related service professional wanting more information about sobriety and recovery, please contact the NE LAP at (800) 851-2336 or (402) 354-8055 or visit our web site at www.lapne.org. If you would like to consult with the NE LAP, or schedule an assessment or an educational presentation, please ask for Michelle Hruska, NE LAP Coordinator, or Nicole Winkler, NE LAP Counselor.

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