

“Booze and Drugs” Presentation. 10th December 2015 at Manor View Practice.

This presentation was kindly given by Jyoti Hadani, a locum community Pharmacist. We had a lively evening – mince pies included - when we learned about whether we could mix (seasonal) alcohol with our regular medications. We have again included some of the questions (Q) and answers (A) that were covered during the evening.

1.DRUGS (MEDICINES).

May be purchased over the counter (OTC), available only through your pharmacist (P) or via Prescription only (POM). Most of these will interact at some level with Alcohol. The result will be an ALTERED RESPONSE to your medication – increase or decrease its effects - and in some cases cause AN ADVERSE HEALTH EFFECT.

2.FATE OF ALCOHOL/MEDICATION/EVEN FOOD.

All of the above will be: a) absorbed into the body. b) distributed around the body. c) metabolised {broken down & used} by the body. and then e) eliminated by the body.

3.THERE ARE TWO MAIN ALCOHOL INTERACTIONS WITH YOUR MEDICINES WHICH ARE :

- a. It can **INTERFERE** with the drug’s activity – which will affect the amount of the ACTIVE drug in your body (either increase or decrease it) or
- b. It can **ENHANCE** the drug effects – eg increase side effects such as the sedative effect of a drug.

4.NOTES ON THE ABOVE

- Only approximately 10% of consumed alcohol is metabolised straight away. The rest is distributed in the body water (remember our bodies are approximately 70% water)
- The by-products of alcohol are TOXIC and can cause flushing.
- Large quantities of alcohol can alter drug metabolism rates, which may have adverse or **FATAL** consequences.

5.THERE ARE MANY AND VARIED INTERACTIONS WITH ALCOHOL INCLUDING:

- If you are on anti-coagulants, your blood may become even thinner.
- If you are taking Metronidazole (maybe for a dental infection) you may get a really bad headache.
- If you are taking antihistamines, alcohol may increase the drowsiness you experience.
- If you are diabetic, alcohol may play havoc with your blood sugar levels.
- Overall there are more than 150 drugs which interact with alcohol – if in doubt speak with your pharmacist.

6.MEDICINE INFORMATION.

Whether you buy your medicines over the counter, obtain them from the pharmacist or receive them via prescription, ALWAYS read the information contained in the package. You will be surprised at how many medicines already contain alcohol!! If in doubt AVOID DRINKING ALCOHOL.

7. CONSUMPTION LEVELS.

Because there are many and complex interactions between medicines and alcohol it is difficult to recommend safe or reasonable levels that may be consumed. Current NHS guidelines suggest 3-4 units per day for men and 2-3 units a day for women. This is under review. However you can always have a face to face (privately) with your Pharmacist, who if necessary can refer the problem back to your GP.

Q:Can I drink if I am diabetic?

A:Yes, but be careful and take the following precautions –

- Do not drink alcohol on an empty stomach or if you are fasting.
- Please keep to a 'moderate' consumption (see above).
- Avoid sugary drinks. Drink light beer/dry wine/drinks with diet sodas.
- Allow 1.5 – 2 hours between drinks.
- Check Blood Sugar Levels – HYPOGLYCAEMIA symptoms may be the same as alcohol intoxication.

Q:Can I drink if I am taking antibiotics or anti-viral drugs?

A:Sorry – best avoided to optimise your medication and reduce any harmful side effects.

Q:Why do I get a headache after drinking red wine, and not white wine?

A:Possibly because red wine, like chocolate, cheese and some other foodstuffs contains natural chemicals known as 'vaso-active amines' which are thought to trigger bad headaches. Best to avoid.

Q:Can I drink if I am pregnant?

A:DoH (Department of Health) recommends that you do not drink. The developing baby may be affected by alcohol and as yet we have no safety levels.

Q:Can I drive the morning after I have been drinking if I have a couple of cups of strong black coffee?

A:Alcohol is broken down in your body at a set rate. No amount of coffee or cold showers will help to speed this up. If you have been drinking 'the night before' **PLEASE DON'T DRIVE.** You will still have alcohol in your body (maybe up to 2 days later) and if you are involved in an accident, whether you have caused it or not, you will be breathalysed and will probably be found to be over the limit.

Q:Will alcohol affect my cholesterol or my use of statins?

A:A controversial subject. In general if you are going to drink, please consume only moderate amounts (as shown above). Excess alcohol can increase your triglycerides (another form of fat) and if you are a heavy drinker with a compromised liver, remember that same liver has to metabolize the statins. Not a good story!

Q:Can I drink alcohol whilst taking anti-depressants?

A:Again, not a good idea. Sometimes it can make the depression worse. Alcohol can increase drowsiness, dizziness and co-ordination.

Q:When I smoke I feel better. Is it the same with alcohol?

A:Difficult one because nicotine actually depresses the dopamine centres in the brain, which are linked to pleasure. However, if you drink when you are smoking, the alcohol actually INCREASES dopamine levels (that's one of the reasons why it is pleasurable to drink alcohol). Maybe that is why so many people drink whilst they are smoking? Can't answer you any better than that.

Q:Can a Pharmacist conduct a medicines review?

A:Every pharmacy must have a private consulting room for face to face consultations. The pharmacist can speak with you and can review only your drugs. This is known as a Medicine Usage Review (MUR). The pharmacist can write to the GP if he/she has any concerns. All other tests, biochemistry, illnesses etc. will be reviewed by your GP. This will be a Medical Review.

Other concerns/questions raised were:

Blind patients finding that the Pharmacist's label has been placed over the Braille info on a box.

Dossett boxes are too complicated.

Double dosing when leaving hospital – both the hospital and the GP prescribe same/different medications.

Problems with meds and hospital discharge.

Why are statins taken in the evening.

As you can see we had a very busy evening.

Jyoti concluded with the following tips:

- Know your units (there is a list in the nurses' waiting area).
- Have 2 alcohol free days a week (at least).
- Know your body, drugs and alcohol.
- Try low-alcohol/alcohol free wines.
- Sipping a soft drink between alcoholic drinks will slow down the rate of your drinking.
- Early start: drink soft drinks for 1st few hours before alcohol.
- Nearing the end of the night – switch to water – may help to rehydrate you and decrease hangover symptoms.

We thanked Jyoti for her time and patience and for answering our questions

Joan Manning on behalf of MVPPG