

NEBRASKA LICENSEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

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Combining Medication and Alcohol Can Be Deadly

The Nebraska Licensee Assistance Program continues to encounter licensees who drink alcohol while using medications that advise against this. 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 drug by altering its availability. In other words, the amount of the medication reaching the receptor site or area to which it was designed to treat 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:

- Narcotic pain relievers – The combination of any opiate with 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 and death.
- Antidepressants – Alcohol is a depressant and when combined with an antidepressant can lead to a high potential for interaction. For example, the alcohol can increase the sedative effect of the antidepressant. The mental skills necessary for safe driving are impaired, resulting in accidents, with injuries and death possible.
- Antibiotics – The effectiveness of the medication may be reduced. Also, in combination with heavy alcohol consumption, some antibiotics may cause headache, nausea, vomiting, or convulsions.

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 cut back on your alcohol use appropriately. If you have continued to drink and have increased the physical or psychological problems the medication is supposed to treat, you may be exhibiting a sign of alcohol abuse. If you know you should not be using alcohol, but you persistently drink and your efforts to control your drinking have been unsuccessful, you may be exhibiting a symptom of alcohol dependence.

If you are a health or health-related service professional and want to stop drinking while taking medication, you can use the services of the NE LAP. You can obtain an alcohol/drug assessment and determine what needs to be done to stop the dangerous practice of drinking alcohol while on a medication that warns against it. Your life may depend on stopping that behavior.

If you are a licensed health or health-related service professional wanting more information about alcohol/drug abuse or addiction, 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 Judi Leibrock, NE LAP Coordinator or Michelle Hruska, NE LAP Counselor

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