Alcohol 101:

Alcohol and Drug Interactions

Quick Quiz

Question: True or false, mixing alcohol with other drugs is only a concern when your mixing with prescription pain medications.
Answer: False. There are many other drugs that are risky to mix with alcohol.

The following are examples of alcohol interactions with different drug categories:

ALCOHOL + DEPRESSANTS = A SYNERGISTIC EFFECT

1 + 1 = 3 —10 (or more, depending on amount consumed)

or…

When you mix alcohol with depressants, the effect is multiplied and slows your central nervous system down at an increased rate. This mixture can create a serious and potentially fatal level of depression of the central nervous system. This means your heart slows, breathing slows, and both can stop if there is enough of the depressants present.

Depressants are: Alcohol; over-the-counter medications such as antihistamines and cough syrups/ suppressants (dextromethorphan); prescription narcotic pain-killers (such as Oxycontin, Vicodin, and Percodan, etc.); Sedatives (benzodiazepines and barbiturates) such as sleeping pills, anti-anxiety pills and muscle-relaxers; GHB, Ketamine, and Rohypnol (roofies); Opium and Heroin.

ALCOHOL + STIMULANTS = A MASKING EFFECT

When you mix alcohol with stimulants, the stimulants mask the effects of the alcohol. It is similar to being in a situation where your body gives you a shot of adrenaline — a natural stimulant — while drinking, and you "*feel sobered up*." However, you are not. Your BAL is exactly the same, but the stimulants give your body messages contradictory to the alcohol effects. They do not cancel each other out. This mixture can create potentially fatal situations because you tend to drink more when you aren't feeling the effects of the alcohol that tell you to stop This increases the risk of having an alcohol emergency.

Stimulants are: Caffeine; Nicotine; Psuedoephedrine, (an over-the-counter medication used in nasal decongestants) and ephedrine; diet pills; ADD medication such as Adderall and Ritalin; Speed (amphetamines and methamphetamines, crank); cocaine; crack; ecstasy (a mixture of stimulants and hallucinogens).

For most people, the effects of mixing alcohol with marijuana depend on

A) which you do first: whether you drink first and then smoke marijuana, or smoke first and then drink and
B) The amount of each consumed.

ALCOHOL then MARIJUANA = A MAGNIFYING EFFECT
Drinking first and then smoking magnifies the alcohol effects already occurring. This is when many feel sick or "get the spins," and can be very disorienting.

MARIJUANA then ALCOHOL = MASKS THE ALCOHOL EFFECT
Smoking first and then drinking masks the effects of the alcohol. This is risky because of a tendency to drink more when you can't feel the alcohol effects, and therefore risk having an alcohol emergency.

Other Drugs' Effects When Mixed With Alcohol:

ASPIRIN	Intensifies Alcohol's effects and is very irritating to the stomach
ACETAMINOPHEN	Increases drowsiness and can create liver problems
ANTI-INFLAMATORY, NON-STEROID	Possibility for stomach irritation, bleeding or ulcer, can create liver problems
ANTIBIOTICS	Reduces the medication's effectiveness
ANTIDEPRESSANTS	Increases sedation, increases depression, increases intoxication effect, possible blood pressure changes
ORAL CONTRACEPTIVES	Intoxication is felt more quickly and lasts longer

Other Important Details to Know:

- **It is estimated that alcohol-medication interactions may be a factor in at least 25 percent of all emergency room admissions. Less serious interactions may often go unreported or unrecognized, but still present risks or problems .**

- **How alcohol and drugs interact:**

  * **Alcohol can influence the effectiveness of a drug by altering its availability, i.e., the extent to which an administered dose reaches its site of action.**

  * **Typical alcohol-drug interactions include the following:**

    1. **A single episode of alcohol use may inhibit a drug's metabolism by competing with the drug for the same set of metabolizing enzymes. This interaction prolongs and enhances the drug's availability, potentially increasing an individual's risk of experiencing harmful side effects from the drug.**

    2. **Chronic (long-term) alcohol ingestion may activate drug-metabolizing enzymes, thus decreasing the drug's availability and diminishing its effects. After these enzymes have been activated, they remain so even in the absence of alcohol, affecting the metabolism of certain drugs for several weeks after cessation of drinking.**

    3. **Enzymes activated by chronic alcohol use transform some drugs into toxic chemicals that can damage the liver or other organs.**

    4. **Alcohol can magnify the inhibitory effects of sedative and narcotic drugs at their site of action in the brain.**