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Illinois Poison Center Warns of Dangerous Holiday Cocktail—Alcohol and Drugs

'Tis the season to be jolly—but mixing alcohol and prescription medications is no laughing matter. With higher alcohol consumption rates during the holiday season and an increasing number of people using multiple prescription drugs, there are potentially dangerous consequences to combining some medications with alcohol.

“Around this time of year, there are more opportunities for social drinking. These situations can lead to health problems for those who drink more than usual or those who do not usually drink,” says Michael Wahl, M.D., medical director, Illinois Poison Center (IPC). “Many people may unknowingly create adverse reactions by combining prescription drugs with alcoholic beverages over the holiday season.”

In general, mixing alcohol with certain medicines can cause nausea, vomiting, headaches, drowsiness, fainting, loss of coordination, internal bleeding or breathing difficulties. The type and severity of these reactions can depend on the medication, the amount of alcohol consumed and physical differences in weight, height or age. In addition, the risk of some drug interactions is higher for those who regularly consume large amounts of alcohol compared to less frequent drinkers.

“Today, people are prescribed more medications than ever before,” says Dr. Wahl. “Knowing exactly what drugs you take and how they interact with each other and with alcohol is essential to a safe holiday season.”

Holiday revelers should always assume that certain types of medicine will interact with alcohol. For example, when mixed with alcohol:

- Medication for anxiety, depression, seizure control, or pain management can lead to drowsiness, dizziness and impairment, or even respiratory depression;
- Cough and cold medicine, sleep aids and other medications that cause drowsiness are more likely to lead to impairment;
- Some antibiotics and diabetes drugs can lead to low blood pressure and abnormal heart rhythms; and

- The side effects of some prescription medications such as stomach pain or nausea can be worsened.

A more thorough list of medications that interact with alcohol can be found on the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism [website](#). If taking any medicine, always check with a doctor or pharmacist before drinking alcohol to avoid potentially dangerous interactions. If someone experiences negative effects from combining alcohol and medication, call the IPC for expert medical help.

For more information on medication safety and other topics from the IPC, [click here](#).

IPC experts are available to provide information and treatment advice 24 hours per day, 365 days per year, including holidays. If you suspect that you or someone you know has been exposed to a potentially harmful substance, please call the IPC at 800-222-1222. The call is free and confidential. For more information, visit the IPC's website: <http://illinoispoisoncenter.org>.

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The Illinois Poison Center is a nonprofit health service that provides the people of Illinois with comprehensive and trusted information and treatment advice on potentially harmful substances via a free, confidential 24-hour helpline staffed by specially trained physicians, nurses and pharmacists.