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Is it okay to drink alcohol while on Zoloft? ^[1]

Dear Alice,

I just started taking Zoloft today. I am going on vacation next week and am wondering if it is safe to drink while on this medication. I can't seem to get a straight answer from anyone. I'm not talking about drinking to oblivion; I'm talking about having a couple of drinks by the campfire. Is this okay?

Answer

Dear Reader,

Many people who take Zoloft, Prozac, and other depression-related medications drink light to moderate amounts of alcohol without serious side effects, or any effects at all. However, it's good to know what the possible interactions may be so that you can be on the lookout.

When there *is* a noticeable reaction from mixing alcohol with anti-depressants, it's often an amplified response to the alcohol (i.e., one drink may end up feeling like two.) If you usually feel tired, or even a bit depressed, after drinking, then you might feel even more so if you're on anti-depressants. Zoloft (generically known as sertraline) is an anti-depressant in the class known as selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors, or SSRIs. It affects your brain's ability to absorb serotonin, which acts as a neurotransmitter, transmitting nerve impulses between nerve cells and affecting mood. Alcohol also affects serotonin levels in your brain by altering your brain's production of it. That's why using these two drugs together could produce unexpected and unwanted emotions. The use of alcohol could also possibly affect Zoloft's ability to do what it is supposed to do.

Similarly, the shaky motor skills and slower reaction time common for alcohol users may get even shakier when anti-depressants are present — these responses can occur suddenly and unexpectedly. Zoloft, and the other anti-depressants like it, can also produce sedative effects. Since alcohol is a central nervous system depressant, lowered heart rate and blood pressure changes are possible. This becomes even more likely as the quantity of alcohol consumed increases. Other symptoms, including headaches and sexual dysfunction, are also sometimes associated with both medications used to treat depression and drinking sessions.

Often, the side effects associated with Zoloft, and other similar medications, subside after the first

few weeks of use. When starting any new drug, as you just have, it's a good idea to see how your new medication will affect you free from other drugs, like alcohol. This way you will not be wondering which drug might be causing a reaction. Also, after using Zoloft for a while, your reactions when mixing it with alcohol may change. Staying attuned to your physical and emotional reactions can help you determine what is going on and why.

As you've demonstrated, understanding the way different drugs affect one another, and affect you, is very helpful. This is true not only of illicit substances, but also of legal drugs, like alcohol, nicotine, and prescription and over-the-counter medications. Indeed, some drug combinations are dangerous. Your health care provider is your main source of information regarding the possible effects of the drugs s/he's suggesting you take. If you're not satisfied with your provider-patient communications, you might ponder some new provider shopping after you get back from your trip.

Happy camping,

Alice!

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