

# MIXING SLEEPING PILLS AND ALCOHOL

Although sleeping pills are generally safe to take on their own, they can create a number of health risks when taken with CNS depressants like alcohol.

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Sleeping pills, whether prescription, over-the-counter or herbal, are used to promote drowsiness in people who have trouble falling asleep and staying asleep. A survey from 2017–2018 found that around **8.2% of American adults** reported taking medication to help them sleep four or more times in the past week.

Unfortunately, sleeping pills carry some risks, especially when mixed with other drugs or alcohol. Mixing the wrong substance with a sleep aid can be dangerous or even deadly in some cases. It is important to know what effects drugs and alcohol can have when taken with sleeping pills.

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## Is It Dangerous To Mix Sleeping Pills and Alcohol?

Medications are typically safe when taken as directed by your health care provider. However, mixing certain prescription and over-the-counter medications with other sedating drugs can be dangerous.

Since sleeping pills and alcohol both have sedating effects, it is dangerous to take these substances together.

## Risks of Combining Sleeping Pills and Alcohol

**Alcohol**, prescription sleeping pills and over-the-counter sleep aids are **CNS depressants** — substances that slow brain activity. When taken together, these medications have an **additive** effect that increases sedation and the risk of side effects. Mixing sleeping pills and alcohol can **increase the risk** of:

- Slowed breathing (respiratory depression)
- Increased sedation
- Falls and fractures
- **Overdose**
- **Coma**
- **Permanent brain damage**
- Death

## Side Effects of Mixing Sleeping Pills and Alcohol

The side effects of sleeping pills and alcohol are magnified when taken together. Even small amounts of alcohol can increase your risk of **side effects** like:

- Slurred speech
- Poor concentration
- Abnormal behavior
- Confusion
- Headache
- Lightheadedness
- Dizziness
- Dry mouth
- Problems with movement and memory
- Lowered blood pressure
- Slowed breathing
- Decreased oxygen to the brain (hypoxia)

## Common Prescription Sleeping Pills Mixed with Alcohol

Taking prescription sleeping pills with alcohol can cause serious adverse effects. Both prescription sleeping pills and alcohol are sedating. When taken together, their side effects may be enhanced, which can lead to a potentially fatal **sleeping pill overdose**. Manufacturers of popular sleeping pills like Ambien and Lunesta have issued warnings about the dangers of mixing sleep aids with alcohol.

### Ambien and Alcohol

Ambien (zolpidem) is a prescription-only drug used **to treat insomnia**, a sleep disorder. It is a CNS depressant, meaning it slows brain activity. People who have trouble falling asleep or staying asleep may take Ambien (zolpidem) to improve their sleep quality. You **should not take Ambien** with other CNS depressants, such as alcohol.

Taking Ambien with alcohol can be dangerous. The **risk of behaviors** like “sleep-driving” and memory loss when preparing and eating food, making phone calls and having sex increases when mixing Ambien and alcohol. Amnesia and anxiety can occur following these activities. In addition to memory

loss, alcohol increases the sedative effects and side effects associated with Ambien and other sleeping pills.

## Lunesta and Alcohol

**Lunesta (eszopiclone)** is approved to treat insomnia in people who have trouble falling asleep or staying asleep. It is available by prescription only from an authorized health care provider. Lunesta is a CNS depressant, so using it with other CNS depressants, such as alcohol, is dangerous. Mixing Lunesta and alcohol increases the sedative effects and side effects of Lunesta.

Deaths from **Lunesta overdoses** have occurred in people who combined Lunesta and alcohol or other CNS depressants. Lunesta should not be used if you drink alcohol in the evening or before bed. Even **daytime use** of other CNS depressants can increase the sedative effects and side effects of Lunesta.

## Temazepam and Alcohol

Restoril (temazepam) is a benzodiazepine approved for the **treatment** of insomnia. Temazepam is prescribed by a health care provider for short-term use (about **seven to 10 days**). Taking temazepam with other **sedating substances**, such as opioids or alcohol, can cause breathing problems, coma and death.

Drinking alcohol with temazepam increases the risk of activities such as **sleep-driving**. You may get up after taking temazepam and perform activities that you do not know you are doing and do not remember the next day. It is recommended to avoid drinking alcohol while taking temazepam.

## Doxepin and Alcohol

Silenor (doxepin) is prescribed to **treat insomnia** in people who have trouble staying asleep. Drinking alcohol with doxepin may increase the sedating effects of alcohol. Increased **sedation** from mixing alcohol and sleep aids like doxepin can cause breathing problems, coma or death.

Activities like **sleep-driving and memory loss** after making phone calls or having sex may occur with prescription sleep aids. The risk of participating in activities you do not remember increases if you drink alcohol while taking doxepin. You should not drink alcohol or use other sedating medications while taking doxepin.

## Trazodone and Alcohol

Trazodone is a serotonin modulator, meaning it increases serotonin levels in the brain. The medication is commonly used to **treat depression**, but it can also **treat insomnia** in some people. Drinking **alcohol with trazodone** may increase its side effects. Some **side effects of trazodone** that may be increased with alcohol use include:

- Nausea and vomiting
- Drowsiness
- Dizziness
- Nightmares
- Agitation
- Hallucinations
- Coma

People taking trazodone should not drink alcohol or take other medications that cause drowsiness. **Overdose leading to death** has occurred in people who took trazodone with substances such as alcohol, diazepam and amobarbital.

## Other Sleeping Aids Commonly Mixed With Alcohol

Other prescription-only sleep aids include:

- Belsomra (suvorexant)
- Dayvigo (lemborexant)
- Doral (quazepam)
- Edluar (zolpidem)
- Estazolam
- Flurazepam
- Halcion (triazolam)
- Hetlioz (tasimelteon)
- Quviviq (daridorexant)
- Rozerem (ramelteon)
- Sonata (zaleplon)
- Zolpimist (zolpidem)

## Over-the-Counter Sleeping Aids and Alcohol

Over-the-counter sleep aids, including herbal products and dietary supplements, carry the same risks as prescription-only sleep aids when combined with alcohol. Combining alcohol with over-the-counter sleep aids **increases the sedative effects and side effects** of these medications.

### Melatonin and Alcohol

Melatonin is a **hormone** that the body naturally produces to regulate sleep. Melatonin derived from **beef cattle or synthetically made** is available over the counter as a dietary supplement for various sleep disorders. Melatonin is **generally safe** when used alone to improve sleep in people who have trouble falling asleep or staying asleep.

**Regulations for dietary supplements** are not as strict as regulations for prescription and over-the-counter medications. Because of a lack of regulations, fewer studies are available for dietary supplements. It may be harmful to mix melatonin and alcohol due to the similar side effects they both cause. **Side effects** like headache, dizziness, nausea and sleepiness may occur from both alcohol and melatonin. Taking alcohol with melatonin may increase the risk of harmful side effects.

### Diphenhydramine and Alcohol

Diphenhydramine is an over-the-counter medication used to treat **various conditions**, including itching, motion sickness and insomnia. Diphenhydramine is an antihistamine that easily crosses into the brain and results in **drowsiness**. Sleep aids containing diphenhydramine include:

- Advil PM
- Tylenol PM
- Aleve PM
- Nytol
- ZzzQuil
- Somnex
- Unisom SleepGels

Drinking alcohol while taking diphenhydramine may increase the sedative effects of alcohol. **Side effects** such as drowsiness, dizziness and slowed breathing may be more intense, and there is an increased risk of overdose. Drinking alcohol should be avoided while taking diphenhydramine.

## Doxylamine and Alcohol

Doxylamine (Unisom SleepTabs) is an over-the-counter medication used for the **short-term treatment of insomnia**. Doxylamine is also an ingredient in various over-the-counter cold medications used to control sneezing and runny nose. It is an antihistamine that **binds to histamine receptors** in both the body and the brain. Its effects in the brain cause drowsiness.

Drowsiness caused by doxylamine is increased when combined with alcohol. The combination of doxylamine and alcohol may also result in difficulty breathing, unusual behavior and memory loss. Avoid drinking alcohol while taking doxylamine.

## Valerian Root and Alcohol

Valerian root is an herb that **promotes sleep and helps relieve anxiety**. It is available as an over-the-counter dietary supplement for use as a sleep aid. Dietary supplements are not regulated as drugs, and there are few studies available. **Reported side effects** include drowsiness, dizziness and headache. Side effects may be increased by drinking alcohol while taking valerian root.

## How Long After Drinking Can You Take a Sleeping Pill?

There is no exact answer to the question of how long you have to wait to take a sleeping pill after drinking. The half-life of alcohol is **four to five hours**, which is the amount of time it takes for your body to get rid of half the alcohol in your system. It can take up to five half-lives (20 to 25 hours) for your body to clear all the alcohol.

There are many **factors** that can affect how quickly your body metabolizes (breaks down) alcohol after drinking. Factors that affect the metabolism of alcohol include:

- The amount of alcohol you use
- How long you have been drinking
- The strength of your drinks
- Your weight and age
- Use of other medications

Which sleep aid you plan on taking can also be a major factor when determining how long after drinking you can take a sleeping pill. Certain sleep aids, such as Lunesta, carry a **warning** not to take them if you have been drinking that evening or before bedtime. The effects of Lunesta were found to be increased even after the daytime use of other sedatives.

Alcohol increases side effects and sedation associated with all sleep aids, whether over-the-counter or prescription. There may also be lingering side effects while the body continues to metabolize alcohol after drinking. All sleep aids carry a warning to **avoid use with alcohol**. To avoid the risks and dangers associated with drinking alcohol and taking sleeping pills, you should wait until your body has had time to completely rid itself of alcohol.

If you or someone you love is **struggling to avoid drinking** while taking a sleep aid, professional addiction treatment can help. At The Recovery Village Cherry Hill at Cooper, our experts can help you address your struggles with alcohol and learn ways to avoid drinking in the future. **Contact us** today to learn more about alcohol addiction treatment programs that can work well for your needs.

## Get Help

If you or someone you love is facing an alcohol use disorder, The Recovery Village Cherry Hill at Cooper can help. We offer medical detox and comprehensive rehab programs that are tailored to suit your needs.

[Contact Us](#)

### Sources

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