



Adderall: Health risks when combined with alcohol?

Question

Alice,

Many of my friends take Adderall while they drink. What are the possible health risks of doing this? I know Adderall is a stimulant, so can you drink much more alcohol while on it without feeling the effects as much?

Answer

Dear Reader,

Thanks for reaching out about a risky trend — combining alcohol and Adderall, also known as amphetamine-dextroamphetamine. For readers who may not be familiar with this drug, it's primarily prescribed to treat attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). This stimulant works by increasing attention and decreasing restlessness, allowing people with the condition to study or work more effectively. Some people may combine amphetamine-dextroamphetamine with alcohol to mask the depressive symptoms of alcohol, allowing them to remain conscious and alert for longer periods of time. While the impacts of alcohol may not be felt as much, studies examining the combination of the two indicate both harmful short- and long-term effects.

Some of the short-term risks include:

- **Increase in typical side effects:** Research indicates that negative side effects from both drugs are enhanced when combined. Symptoms include nausea, vomiting, dehydration, cardiovascular problems, aggressiveness, and an increased likelihood of engaging in risky behavior.
- **Issues with visual and motor cognition:** People may experience significant impairments to their reaction time, motor coordination, and visual perception, which can pose safety risks.
- **Alcohol poisoning:** Using stimulants such as amphetamine-dextroamphetamine to prolong drinking may result in consumption of unhealthy, potentially dangerous, amounts of alcohol. When the stimulant acts to block the depressant effects of alcohol, it can be easier to miss the body's warning signs of intoxication and may make it easier to develop alcohol poisoning.

Some of the long-term risks include:

- **Cardiovascular disease:** When these two substances are combined, users are more likely that they will experience accelerated heart rate, irregular heartbeat, or increased blood pressure. These symptoms may increase the risk of developing cardiovascular disease.
- **Mental health:** Not only can alcohol reduce the efficacy of amphetamine-dextroamphetamine, thereby making it difficult for a user to focus, but it can also increase the likelihood that they'll experience depression or anxiety.

Additionally, regardless of alcohol use, taking amphetamine-dextroamphetamine that isn't prescribed to you isn't recommended. Health care providers prescribe drugs in dosages that are specific to an individual's condition.

Therefore, ingesting someone else's prescription may lead to adverse reactions or unexpected side effects. Some of the psychological effects may include paranoia, psychotic episodes, anxiety, and severe depression upon withdrawal. Some of the physical effects can include nausea and vomiting, insomnia, weight loss, headaches, and fevers. Some of the more serious effects include heart palpitations, convulsions, and irregular heartbeat, tremors, and muscle twitching.

If you and your friends are students, it may be helpful to note the academic impacts of combining the substances. Studies have shown that students who combined amphetamine-dextroamphetamine with alcohol were more likely to have lower grade point averages, miss class, and perform poorly on a test or project, compared to those who don't combine the drugs. Reader, the situation you've presented may also be an opportunity for further reflection. Why is it that your friends want to drink more alcohol? If the goal is to enjoy each other's company while minimizing the effects, then combining alcohol with amphetamine-dextroamphetamine may not be the best option. Perhaps you can instead suggest drinking beverages a bit more slowly, alternating with water in between, and eating before and while drinking, which can help reduce the risk of experiencing the downsides of alcohol consumption and overall consume less alcohol. You may want to share what you've learned with your friends and possibly consider suggesting other ideas for fun that involve fewer health risks. If you have additional questions, check out the Alcohol & Other Drugs section of the *Go Ask Alice!* archives to find more information about drug interactions with other substances, how to avoid a hangover, how to drink responsibly and in moderation, and how to have fun without substances. It's great that you're interested in learning more about these drug interactions as doing so can help to inform decision for your future, as well as being able to share this information with your friends if you choose.

Take care,

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Alcohol & Other Drugs

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