How Does Alcohol Affect Overactive Bladder?

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Alcohol and the Bladder

If you suffer from overactive bladder (OAB), you may wonder if you may drink alcoholic beverages. Every person is different, and some people who have an overactive bladder may be able to consume limited quantities of alcohol occasionally; while others must avoid alcohol consumption entirely.

There are a few reasons why drinking alcohol with overactive bladder is not recommended.

How Does Alcohol Affect the Bladder?

Alcohol increases urine production and irritates the bladder. This occurs because alcohol interferes with the production of the hormone, vasopressin.

Vasopressin has many functions in the body. It regulates fluid balance by increasing the reabsorption of water from waste products. Since the body is not receiving the message to reabsorb water; excess water is removed from it via urine. When alcohol is consumed, the body makes more urine the bladder requires frequent emptying.

The reason why people are dehydrated after a night of heavy drinking is because alcohol dries out the tissues of the body by increasing the amount of urine produced and excreted. If you have an overactive bladder, you already need to urinate frequently without drinking alcohol. Drinking alcohol is not in your best interest because you will need to get rid of more urine and have the urge to go even more frequently than you already do. In addition, you risk becoming dehydrated if you consume a moderate or large amount of alcoholic beverages.

Alcohol is an irritant. Its irritating effects may make you feel as if you have to urinate more frequently as well. If you already suffer from a sensitive bladder, the irritating effects of alcohol will only make the urge to urinate occur more frequently and make it even more difficult to control your OAB.

Are Some Types of Alcohol Less Harmful to the Bladder?

Sometimes people ask if it would be better to drink a concentrated alcoholic beverage, such as whiskey or vodka instead of beer, mixed drinks or wine so that the volume of liquid is reduced. The answer to that question is no.

Most of the increased urine precipitated by drinking alcohol is not due to the liquid in the beverage. Rather, it is caused by alcohol’s effect of increasing urine production.

There is no benefit of drinking undiluted hard liquor as opposed to other alcoholic beverages. Conversely, there is no advantage of drinking wine or beer as opposed to hard liquor in an effort to reduce the irritating effects of alcohol on the tissues of the urinary tract.

Alcohol and Medications

You may be taking medications to relieve the symptoms of overactive bladder. Unfortunately, most pharmaceuticals prescribed to treat overactive bladder impair your body's ability to regulate temperature well. You may be at risk for heat stroke and several other side effects.

The drugs may cause dizziness, sleepiness, restlessness and insomnia. Some people may even experience hallucinations. Alcohol increases the likelihood of these side effects occurring.

Heat Exhaustion and Heat Stroke

People often like to reach for a beer or cold beverage when the weather is hot and sunny. Medications used to treat overactive bladder interfere with the body's ability to produce sweat. Since sweat is not being produced, the internal body temperature rises. Consuming alcohol increases the effects of the drugs; plus it dehydrates the body and impairs judgment. All of these factors put people who are on medication for the treatment of overactive bladder at a higher risk of developing heat exhaustion or heat stroke.

Signs of heat exhaustion include dizziness, fatigue, reduced sweat production, nausea, vomiting and fever. If heat exhaustion occurs, medical attention should be sought. Move the affected individual to a cool environment and encourage non-alcoholic fluids if he or she is able to drink. Cool the person's body by removing clothing and applying cool water or ice to the body.

Untreated, heat exhaustion may lead to life-threatening heat stroke. Signs of heat stroke include all of the symptoms of heat exhaustion plus high fever, rapid breathing, fast pulse, seizures, changes in behavior, confusion and a loss of consciousness. If you suspect that a person is suffering from heatstroke, call emergency services immediately as brain damage or death may occur. While waiting for emergency services to arrive, protect the person from injury and continue taking measures to cool the person off.

Underlying Causes and Alcohol

While the cause of overactive bladder is not usually known, there are some health issues that may predispose a person to develop overactive bladder. Alcohol is contraindicated for many people who have underlying illnesses. If a person is taking medications for a health care condition; alcohol may interact with medications given for those ills.

People who suffer from neurologic disorders often experience overactive bladders. Drinking alcohol may worsen symptoms of multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's disease or seizures. People who have experienced strokes may be on blood thinners, and alcohol should not be consumed by people on blood thinners. Alcohol increases the effects of many drugs used to treat seizures and other neurologic conditions. Most of these types of medications put stress on the liver. Alcohol serves to increase that stress.

Diabetics may have an overactive bladder due to an increase in urine production and frequent urinary tract infections. Alcohol provides empty calories and causes blood sugar levels to increase. Diabetics are usually advised not to drink alcohol or to limit the intake of alcohol significantly.

Older adults may experience overactive bladders. Visual changes, cognitive decline and mobility problems may be present. Consuming alcohol increases the frequency of trips to the bathroom. Episodes of incontinence may occur. The risk of disorientation, falls and injuries rise if alcohol is consumed.

So, Can I Drink With Overactive Bladder?

I would not recommend it. I suggest not drinking alcohol, especially if an underlying health problem is present or if medications to manage overactive bladder are being used. Talk with your health care provider to see what he or she recommends if you have questions.

In my opinion, the benefits of drinking are outweighed by the risks for most people who have an overactive

bladder.

Alternatives to Drinking Alcohol?

If you are out on the town, opt for one of the fancy mixed drinks, but ask the bartender to leave out the alcohol. They still taste good, even without the alcohol. At home, consume nonalcoholic wine, unless the acidity irritates your bladder. I do not recommend nonalcoholic beer as carbonated beverages are irritating.

Caffeinated beverages, such as coffee, black, tea, green tea, cocoa and yerba mate irritate the bladder. Limit these beverages. Avoid artificial sweeteners and carbonated beverages. Acidic fruit juices may cause bladder irritation.

The best beverage that you can drink is water. You may choose to consume decaffeinated beverages and herb teas. Try carob instead of cocoa.

A simple tea may be prepared from fresh corn silk. Pour two cups of boiling water of the silk from one ear of corn. Cover the container. Let the silk infuse for twenty minutes. Discard the corn silk. Drink the tea. It has a light, corn-like flavor. Corn silk effectively relieves bladder spasms; reducing the urge to void.