Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Effects of Alcohol on Your Surgery

This information will help you understand how drinking alcohol can affect your surgery. It also explains what we can do to help you at MSK.

How alcohol can affect your surgery

The amount of alcohol you drink can affect you during and after your surgery. Talk with your care team about how much alcohol you drink. This will help them plan your care.

Stopping alcohol suddenly can cause:

- Panic symptoms and severe (very bad) anxiety. These include:
  - Dizziness.
  - Tremors (shaking).
  - Rapid (fast) breathing.
  - Heart pounding.
  - Worrying a lot.
- Seizures (shaking or stiffening of your body that you cannot control).
- Delirium (changes in your mental state).
- Death.

If we know you're at risk for any of these problems, we can prescribe medicine to help prevent them.

If you use alcohol often, you may be at risk for other problems during and after surgery. These include:

- Bleeding.
- Infections.
- Heart problems.
- Needing more nursing care.
- A longer hospital stay.

What we will do

At MSK, we talk to everyone about their alcohol use. Your care team will ask you about the amount of alcohol you drink every day. This includes beer, wine, and liquor.

Your care team will also ask you to answer the CAGE questionnaire questions below.

In the last year:

- Have you ever felt you should cut down on your drinking?
- Have people annoyed you by criticizing your drinking?
- Have you ever felt bad or guilty about your drinking?
- Have you ever had a drink first thing in the morning (also called an eye-opener) to:
    - Steady your nerves?
    - Get rid of a hangover?

What you can do

- Be honest with your care team about how much alcohol you drink.
- Try to stop drinking alcohol once your surgery is planned. Tell your healthcare provider right away if, after you stop drinking, you:
  - Get a headache.
  - Feel nauseous (like you're going to throw up).
  - Feel increased anxiety (strong feelings of worry).
  - Cannot sleep.

These are early signs of alcohol withdrawal and can be treated.

- Tell your care team if you cannot stop drinking.
- Ask your care team any questions you have about drinking and surgery. As always, all of your health information will be kept private.

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

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