



PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Alcohol and Your Surgery

This information will help you understand how drinking alcohol can affect your surgery and what we can do to help you.

How Alcohol Can Affect Your Surgery

The amount of alcohol you drink can affect you during and after your surgery. It's important that you talk with your healthcare providers about how much alcohol you drink so that we can plan your care.

Stopping alcohol suddenly can cause seizures (uncontrollable shaking or stiffening of your body), delirium (changes in your mental state), and death. If we know you're at risk for any of these problems, we can prescribe medications to help prevent them.

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

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

What We Will Do

At Memorial Sloan Kettering (MSK), we talk to everyone about their alcohol intake. Your healthcare providers will ask you about the amount of alcohol you drink every day. This includes beer, wine, and liquor. They will also ask you to answer the

questions below, which are known as the CAGE questionnaire.

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 or get rid of a hangover?

What You Can Do

- Be honest with your healthcare providers about how much alcohol you drink.
- Try to stop drinking alcohol once your surgery is planned. If you get a headache, nausea (feel like you're going to throw up), increased anxiety, or can't sleep after you stop drinking, tell your doctor right away. These are early signs of alcohol withdrawal and can be treated.
- Tell your healthcare providers if you can't stop drinking.
- Ask your healthcare providers any questions you have about drinking and surgery. As always, all of your medical information will be kept confidential.

If you have any questions, contact a member of your healthcare team directly. If you're a patient at MSK and you need to reach a provider after 5:00 PM, during the weekend, or on a holiday, call 212-639-2000.

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

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