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 healthcare providers about how much alcohol you drink. This will help them plan your care.

Stopping alcohol suddenly can cause:

- 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 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 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?
  - 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. Tell your healthcare provider right away if, after you stop drinking, you:
  - Get a headache.
  - Feel nauseous (like you're going to throw up)
  - Increased anxiety (strong feelings of worry)
  - Cannot sleep.

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

- Tell your healthcare providers if you cannot 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 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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