

Alcohol Consumption & MG

The following document was prepared by the Myasthenia Gravis Association.

Drinking alcohol causes weakness and since Myasthenia Gravis is characterized as a fluctuating muscle weakness, it makes sense not to increase the probability of fatigue. Most prescription drugs contain warnings related to alcohol use, for instance, a common drug prescribed for MG is Mestinon and it comes with a warning: *“consuming alcoholic beverages while taking Mestinon could result in an increase in the drug's effects, most notably drowsiness”*. Most of us don't take time to read the small print on our medication leaflets, but you would be wise to read the warnings associated with drinking.

For many, drinking has become a part of the way people socialize, celebrate and unwind after a hard day's work. If you are living with MG and learning to become your own health care advocate, then why not establish healthy ways to socialize with friends and family, celebrate occasions and relax without the debilitating effects of alcohol.

An interaction between alcohol and a drug is described as any change in the properties or effects of the drug in the presence of alcohol. Drug interactions may be:

- Additive: The net effect of the drug taken with alcohol is the sum of their effects.
- Synergistic: The effect of the drug when combined with alcohol is greater than the sum of their effects.
- Antagonistic: The effect of the drug is diminished in the presence of alcohol.

The liver is responsible for metabolizing drugs as well as alcohol and therefore potentially dangerous alcohol-drug interactions can occur in both light and heavy drinkers. If you take prescription or over-the-counter medications, ask your health care provider for advice about alcohol intake. Recognize that even herbal medicines and supplements can have adverse interactions with alcohol.

Many cold and allergy medications, over-the-counter painkillers and vitamins can come in a time release form. It is important to know that alcohol dissolves the coating, releasing the full dose immediately instead of being properly delayed.

WHAT IF YOU'RE STOPPED BY THE POLICE?

First of all, if you're having symptoms related to MG which could impair your ability to drive, you shouldn't be behind the wheel. Although driving represents a sense of control and freedom in our lives, a variety of warning signs such as blurred or double vision, fatigue, leg or arm weakness, etc. should motivate us to find some generous friends or family members who would be able to drive us if necessary. It's okay to ask for help.

So you're driving along and you hear the police siren, and now you realize that it's you who is being pulled over. Did you swerve, go over the yellow line, exceed the speed limit or perhaps your back tail light is out? If you've had a drink or two, you'll have to undergo the consequences and take a breathalyzer test and possibly face a ticket or arrest. But, maybe you didn't have a drink and when the policeperson comes to your car door, you've pulled the **MEDICAL ALERT CARD** out of your wallet that you got from the MGA that says:

I have Myasthenia Gravis, a disease that can make me so weak that I may have difficulty standing or speaking clearly. In addition, I may have drooping eyelids, double vision, and even difficulty breathing. Sometimes these symptoms are mistaken for intoxication. However, if my breathing and swallowing difficulty is severe, I may be having an "MG crisis" that warrants emergency treatment.

If I appear to need help, please contact my physician or hospital immediately.

You might feel that this is your "get out of jail free" card like in the game Monopoly, but if the policeperson feels that you did not obey traffic signals or were driving unsafely and now reads that you may have serious symptoms connected to a chronic disease that could potentially render you a dangerous driver, you could also get a ticket. If you hit another car or damage property, you could be arrested. If you have to go to court, be sure to have legal representation and medical records to show that your Myasthenia Gravis is a fluctuating muscle weakness and that most of the time you are without symptoms and perfectly able to drive safely. Without competent representation the judge could take your license away.

Our life is filled with choices. Be sure to make the right choice about driving safely without MG symptoms that could impact your life and the life of others.