ALCOHOL IS A DRUG CONVERSATION STARTER

What is a drug interaction?

- What different types of drugs do to the brain and body and how those respond with one another

Why is it important to understand this?

- When people take more than one substance at a time these can result in harmful, even deadly, drug interactions.
- Although the exact outcome can be hard to predict, the general trend can be described based on drug classification/type.

Potentiation - two drugs that work in the same direction

- What happens?
  - Instead of 1+1 = 2, it's a case of 1+1 > 2. Your body experiences the effects of each drug, along with an additive (or increased) effect.
  - This means a person could have a relatively low BAC, but, if another substance has been taken, could be showing depressant effects that are 2.5 to 3 times or more pronounced.
  - When combining alcohol with other depressant-classified drugs, this can result in breathing slowing (or stopping) and heart rate slowing (or stopping)
  - Examples:
    - Two depressants:
      - Alcohol + Marijuana, Vicodin, Xanax, Opioids, Ketamine (K), GHB or Heroin

Antagonistic - two drugs that work in the opposite direction

- What happens?
  - Because one drug slows the central nervous system and one drug speeds it up, the body is placed in physiological "tug of war," which can short circuit the central nervous system and cause cardiac arrest.
  - If the effects of a substance are masked by Ir, a person might continue using one (or both) substances more than they normally wI, which could exceed what is normal, thus leading to a lethal dose.
  - Stimulants tend to leave the body faster than depressants, meaning that as drugs wear off at different rates, the person could be left with a lethal dose of the depressant (alcohol).
    - Two stimulants:
      - Alcohol + cocaine, Adderall/Ritalin, energy drinks, Meth or MDMA (Molly/ecstasy)

Cocaine - results in a three-way drug interaction.

- What happens?
  - The liver manufactures a third drug, called cocaethylene, which produces a more pronounced high, objectively, and the risk of death increases.

Over-the-Counter Pain Medications (aspirin, acetaminophen, ibuprofen) - the biggest issue here is safety to your body and internal organs.

- What happens?

- Alcohol increases the threshold for gastric bleeding and so do these pain relievers.
- Additional concerns related to the functions of the stomach, kidney and liver have been reported.

Prescription Medications (antibiotics, anti-depressants or any other medications) - Just because prescriptions can be obtained legally does not mean they are safe when combined with each other or with alcohol. Even small combinations can prove to be dangerous.

- What happens?
  - Based on your personal health, the interactions may vary.
    - » Ask your prescribing provider if you can drink while on the medication.
      - If they say no, that's important to know for the following reasons:
        - The medication needs a chance to do what is intended to do and alcohol can interfere.
        - There could be serious interactions that occur between alcohol and the prescribed drug.
        - The interactions could damage internal organs.

Why is this important to know?

- If you make the choice to use alcohol in combination with another drug, it opens up an unpredictable situation from a drug interaction standpoint.
- If you are ever worried about someone's safety in relation to having used more than one substance, call 9-1-1 sooner rather than later.
- Reading the label every time you use a non-prescription or prescription drug and taking the time to learn about drug interactions are critical to your health.

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