Alcohol Use and Chronic Pain

by EMILY VALLES

Adverse Effects of Using Alcohol to Treat Chronic Pain

Chronic pain can be very difficult to deal with, and oftentimes it seems like there is nothing that will help to relieve the pain. Alcohol is something that has been used to relieve pain symptoms since ancient times, and it has been proven to reduce pain levels. Unfortunately, there are many risks associated with using alcohol as a pain management strategy, and often consumption of alcohol can end up causing the chronic pain sufferer damage to other parts of the body and even more pain.

Alcohol helps to decrease the feeling of pain in the body by depressing the central nervous system. By affecting the nervous system, it will allow the body to feel a mild sense of pain relief. It should be noted that alcohol does not provide any medical pain relief benefits; it only helps to make the body feel less pain. Using alcohol as a pain relief tool can cause significant issues, especially with excessive use or in combination with medications.

The main concern with using alcohol as a pain reliever is that the body will begin to build up a tolerance to the effects of alcohol. This tolerance will require the chronic pain sufferer to consume higher levels of alcohol over time to receive the same feeling of minor pain relief.

Excessive alcohol consumption over an extended period can have adverse effects on the body, such as stomach ulcers, liver problems, and chemical dependency on the use of alcohol. There are also many adverse and painful effects that the patient can suffer when they try to wean off the use of alcohol once there is a chemical dependency.

As alcohol only provides a sensation of minor pain relief, it is quite common for chronic pain sufferers to mix the use of alcohol with pain medications to achieve a higher level of pain relief. Mixing alcohol with any number of pain medications can be quite dangerous, and will increase the adverse effects that alcohol and pain medications can have on the body on their own.

Even the use of over-the-counter pain medications with alcohol can be damaging to the body. Medications such as ASA, acetaminophen, and ibuprofen can increase the risk of stomach ulcers, intestinal bleeding, and liver damage.

Prescription medications and alcohol are also an undesirable combination. Both alcohol and prescription painkillers depress the central nervous system and can cause drowsiness, which will heighten the effects on the body much greater than one or the other on its own. The risk factors for mixing prescription pain medications and alcohol include decreased heart rate, nausea, vomiting, decreased breathing, overdose, and possibly even death.

The use of alcohol for the relief of chronic pain can also have adverse effects on sleep. Chronic pain can disrupt your sleep as it is often very difficult to get comfortable and fall asleep when suffering from any type of chronic pain. The use of alcohol can often disrupt the normal sleep cycle further, which can make it increasingly harder to fall and stay asleep.

Getting enough sleep and sleeping well is very important to prevent stress, depression, and fatigue. Stress, depression, and fatigue are all factors that can negatively affect the ability to deal with pain. This points to alcohol as an ineffective method for chronic pain relief as lack of sleep or poor sleep can leave the body less able to deal with the pain, and using alcohol to cope with the chronic pain will cause issues with falling and staying asleep.