Can You Drink When You Have Lupus?

by ANNA SCANLON

Do Lupus and Alcohol Mix?

Most people who develop lupus do so in their childbearing years, which also happens to be the prime age for being invited to parties that include copious amounts of booze. Developing my symptoms at age 20 meant that I had to navigate the Greek scene carefully and tread lightly when it came to my drinking habits, something I am still doing today.

Cutting back on your alcohol if you have lupus can be tough, especially if you're in a university environment, but it is necessary in order to really start helping your body heal from the inside out. If you are on lupus meds, this is especially important as alcohol affects the way the body metabolizes the medication you're on — it will up the process to lightning speed.

The small amount of research I've done into lupus and alcohol shows that people with lupus should drink in moderation mostly due to the medications they take. For me, when I drink, my medicine kicks into overdrive and the side effects are like turning up a stereo to maximum volume. Without actually becoming drunk, I start to lose my fine motor skills and act way drunker than I am, even after only a few glasses.

I always thought it was just me being a lightweight, but it turns out that lupus medication often reacts that way in the face of alcohol, putting you out of commission even before the party's gotten into full swing. However, on the plus side, I've only ever thrown up from being drunk once because my medicine makes me feel so drunk that I'm ready to call it quits long before my body catches up with my alcohol intake.

Drinking in moderation has never really been a big deal for me. None of my immediate family are big drinkers and my mother was insistent that I not even taste wine at home until I turned 21. When I went off to college, I was often around people drinking but still socialized without drinking myself.

Although this wasn't difficult for me, aside from the occasional comment here and there (and that one pushy guy at the party who always really wants you to drink), I know this would be especially difficult for a lot of people. However, with almost everything with lupus, the key is both listening to your body and keeping it under control.

Be Aware

If you are of age and decide to go out drinking with friends, always make sure you know well ahead of time the adverse effects of your medication and alcohol together.

Discuss this with your doctor at length, especially if you are a college student where the peer pressure to drink can be very high.

The side effects can range from very mild, like acting drunk way before you actually are, to something far more severe.

You should also be very aware of your limits and when your body is telling you it is time to stop drinking. Remember, just because you feel like it is time to stop drinking doesn't mean that the party is over or that you have to go home.

You can still stay out and have fun, just switch to something without alcohol in it. Knowing your limits can, however, save you and the people you're out with a much bigger headache in the long run.

If you go out, of course knowing your limits is important, but so is drinking lots of water and making sure you stay hydrated in between alcoholic drinks. This can help counteract the effects of the alcohol and make sure it doesn't hit you all too quickly.

Next page: keeping friends in the loop and the risks of binge drinking.

Keep Friends Up to Speed

When you are out drinking with friends, lupus or not, it is always important to ensure you are looking out for one another. This is even more important when you have lupus — someone needs to be very aware of the fact that you could be sick or have an issue due to your medication before you even go out.

You'll also want to make sure your friends know why you may not be able to drink like they can, or like you used to. In college, I am very aware that this can be an issue, as people like to peer pressure and be very nosy about why someone isn't drinking.

Because of this, you may want to choose friends who don't drink very often, or sit your friends down and explain lupus means that drinking has to be a moderate activity for you. Good friends will definitely understand this and will leave you alone when you know you've reached your limit.

Remember, Binge Drinking Is Never Healthy

Although college culture (and sometimes post-college culture, depending on where you live) often encourages binge drinking, it is important to remember that this isn't healthy for anyone, lupus or not.

If you are trying to lead a healthy lifestyle and keep your lupus symptoms at bay, binge drinking isn't going to help. Besides, when you've got lupus, the hangovers can be even more brutal than "normal" people's, so why make yourself feel worse?

The upside to all of this is that you can get a little buzz going long before everyone else and it is typically only generated after only a couple of drinks. This means your bar tab is going to be a heck of a lot lower than your peers.

Everything in Moderation

If you do choose to drink, moderation is key. There is definitely no harm in having a few drinks every once in a while (if your doctor is in agreement).

But, as with everything involving lupus, you still need to pay close attention to your body while you're doing it.

For me, certain alcohols have negative effects on my body. As much as I really want to love red wine, it gives me a huge headache, so I have to stick to white or bubbly wine. Similarly, some hard alcohol will make me feel sick immediately, so I steer clear of it.

Personally, I'm in for more of the fruity/sweet drinks with limited alcohol content. I'm not sure whether it is my personality or because I experience interactions with my medication, but personally I don't see a point in drinking if I am not enjoying the taste of it. Therefore, I stick to what I like, which is usually a lot less alcoholic than what

most people are drinking.

Keeping your alcohol intake to a moderate level is going to have a much more positive impact on you and your physical and mental health. Don’t listen to anyone who tells you any differently.