

## CAN ALCOHOL AFFECT MY SURGERY?

If you are scheduled for surgery, it is very important to be honest with your health care providers about your alcohol use. Your recovery from surgery may not proceed as planned if your health care providers are not aware of your history of alcohol use. Tell your health care provider how many drinks you have per day (or per week). Although it may be difficult to discuss alcohol use with your healthcare team, it is done for your safety and to improve the outcome of your surgery.

Excessive alcohol use, defined as **drinking more than three drinks per day**, can affect the outcome of your surgery. Binge drinking (consuming large amounts of alcohol infrequently, such as on weekends) can also affect the outcome of your surgery.

### How does alcohol affect my surgery?

If you drink more than three drinks a day, you could have a complication, called alcohol withdrawal, after surgery. **Alcohol withdrawal** is a set of symptoms that people have when they suddenly stop drinking, after using alcohol for a long period of time. During withdrawal, a person's central nervous system "overreacts" and causes symptoms such as shakiness, sweating, hallucinations and other more serious side effects.

Untreated alcohol withdrawal can cause life-threatening complications after surgery, including tremors, seizures, hallucinations, delirium tremens, and even death. Untreated alcohol withdrawal often leads to a longer stay in the intensive care unit (ICU) and a longer hospital stay. Chronic heavy drinking also can interfere with several organ systems and biochemical controls in the body, causing serious, even life-threatening complications.

## Alcohol withdrawal treatment before surgery

Health care providers can offer alcohol withdrawal treatment to provide these outcomes:

- Decreased risk of post-operative seizures and delirium tremens
- Decreased need for restraining devices
- Decreased risk of patient falls
- Reduced need for potent sedative medications
- Decreased length of stay in the hospital
- Less time on the mechanical ventilator after surgery
- Lower risk of organ failure and biochemical complications

## How do I know if I am at risk for alcohol withdrawal after surgery?

During your pre-surgical visit, you will be asked to answer a series of questions to assess your risk of alcohol withdrawal and other alcohol problems after surgery. Please respond to the questions as honestly as possible.

Remember, any information provided is held in strict confidence. We are here to help you prepare and recover from your surgery as quickly and safely as possible.