

# Alcohol and Your Health After Bariatric (Weight Loss) Surgery

## *What You Need to Know.*



*“When you have that first drink, it is literally like sticking a needle of alcohol in your vein.”*

### Know your risks.

Alcohol will affect you very differently after certain types of bariatric surgery and there is an increased risk for alcohol problems, even in people who never had this problem before. There may also be risks related to pain medications or other drugs after bariatric surgery.

### Get informed.

### Be safe.

*“I respond very differently to pills now. It used to take half an hour to feel the effects. Now I feel the effects within ten or fifteen minutes. The effects are more intense but they don’t last as long, so you have to take more to get that euphoria.”*

*If you have any questions, please contact your bariatric center.*

*Produced by MeSSAGe:*

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**Know your risks.**



**Get informed.**



**Be safe.**

Yale



## Alcohol will affect you very differently.

- Many people who have had bariatric surgery find alcohol hits them much harder and much faster than it did before surgery.
- Even if you do not feel a difference in the effects of alcohol, your blood alcohol level will be much higher, and rise much faster, than it did before surgery.
- Consequences could include impaired driving, arrests for driving while intoxicated, serious injuries (e.g., from falls), legal problems, etc.
- One drink will have the effect of two or more, and will affect you much more quickly.
- **Even if you feel sober**, your blood alcohol level may still be over the legal driving limit.



### Recommendations:

- Follow the guidelines from your surgical team about drinking alcohol after surgery.
- Once you have had surgery, be very cautious when drinking alcohol:
  - Even one drink may put you over the legal limit for driving.
  - Always arrange for a designated driver if you will be drinking alcohol.

*“After the first drink, I felt like I was under the table.”*



## Increased risk for alcohol problems.

- Some people who rarely or never drank before surgery begin to drink after surgery.
- Some people may even develop an addiction to alcohol after surgery.
- Alcohol problems may develop years after surgery.
- People continue to be at risk for developing alcohol problems for more than a decade after surgery.



*“I don’t regret getting the surgery, I regret becoming an alcoholic.”*

### Recommendations:

- Remain watchful of your alcohol use in the long-term after surgery, paying attention to potential “red flags”, including:
  - Drinking alcohol more often than you used to before surgery.
  - Drinking larger amounts of alcohol than you used to before surgery (or drinking the same amount even though the alcohol is affecting you more intensely).
  - Feeling more drunk than you used to before surgery.
  - Experiencing cravings for alcohol.
  - Experiencing “blackouts” or memory loss when drinking alcohol.
- Remember that these problems may develop more than a decade after surgery.
- If you or anyone else has concerns about your drinking, talk to a healthcare professional about your alcohol use.

*“I was up to a fifth a day, really out of hand. I was keeping half-pints in my truck so I could drink at 6am on the way to work, because you can’t buy alcohol before 7am.”*

## Risk of increased use of pain medications.

- Even though most people find that their pain conditions improve after bariatric surgery, the use of pain medications actually tends to increase over time after surgery.
- Studies have found that some people become extremely frequent users of pain medications in the long term after bariatric surgery.
- The risk of increased or excessive use of pain medications after bariatric surgery is higher for people who were sometimes using these medications before surgery.

*“I could never take enough, it escalated way out of control. Pain was distorted because of opiates.”*

### Recommendations:

- Always share your history of use of pain medications and other drugs with all of your medical providers.
- If you have a history of using more of your pain medication than prescribed, or any other substance, than you or your doctor intended, it is very important to let your bariatric team know about this. They will help you make a plan for pain management and help to keep problems from re-occurring after surgery.
- If you have already had bariatric surgery, be mindful of the risk for excessive or unsafe use of pain medicines. Be on the lookout for increased use of these medicines over time.

*“Pain pills seemed safe and innocent... I began to act the part of a patient who was in pain in order to get more pills.”*

