



# Celexa & Alcohol: Understanding the Risks

Published: 11/15/2022

Updated: 11/16/2022



Written by:

Diana Rangaves  
PharmD, RPh



Reviewed by:

Dena Westphalen  
PharmD

If you are experiencing depression, your doctor may prescribe the antidepressant Celexa to ease your symptoms. As a psychotropic medication, taking Celexa and alcohol can increase each substance's side effects on the central nervous system. Celexa is used to treat depression which can co-occur in those struggling with alcohol abuse, which may lead many individuals to drink while on Celexa, making the condition hard to treat.

## [Boxed Warning: Citalopram \(Celexa\)](#)

## What Is Celexa & How Does It Work?

[Celexa](#) is a brand name for the active drug citalopram, which is FDA-approved to treat depression.<sup>1</sup> Celexa is a [selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor](#) (SSRI) that increases serotonin levels in the brain, a chemical substance used to promote a sense of mental balance for mood and sleep. Celexa may also be used as an off-label (non-FDA-approved) treatment for generalized [anxiety disorders](#) and [premenstrual dysphoric disorder](#) (PMDD). When treating anxiety disorders with Celexa, you

should first consult your doctor for further guidance. The [antidepressant makes many people feel better](#) within one or two weeks of medication. However, headache, dry mouth, or trouble sleeping are some possible side effects of Celexa you are likely to experience when starting medication.<sup>2</sup>

## Side Effects of Alcohol & Celexa

Combining Celexa and alcohol can be dangerous. Celexa may also cause severe heart effects with any dosage over 40mg. Higher dosages of either Celexa or alcohol may lead to irregular heart rates, with Celexa sometimes leading to sudden death. Taking alcohol can increase the nervous system side effects of Celexa, such as dizziness and difficulty concentrating. Both may also lead some people to experience impaired judgment and thinking. Also, Celexa and alcohol can make a person experience hangover anxiety, sometimes known as “hangxiety.” [Hangxiety](#) is a negative emotional state leading to anxiousness and stomach aches after taking large amounts of alcohol.<sup>3</sup>

Side effects of Celexa can include:<sup>4</sup>

- Blurred vision
- Loss of appetite
- Tiredness
- Dry mouth
- Indigestion
- Drowsiness
- Constipation
- Sexual disorders
- Sleep problems
- Sweating
- Infection
- Slowed growth
- Tremors
- Cough
- Weight changes

Side effects of alcohol can include:

- Changes in mood
- Impulsive behavior
- Diarrhea
- Head pain
- Loss of coordination
- Loss of consciousness
- Headaches
- Sense of euphoria
- Trouble making decisions
- [Insomnia](#)
- Problems with memory and concentration
- Weakened immune system
- Changes in appetite
- Vomiting
- Blackouts
- Alcohol poisoning

## Adverse Interactions Between Celexa & Alcohol

Alcohol consumption is not recommended while taking Celexa. When combining Celexa and alcohol, either substance is likely to present its risks. Taking Celexa and alcohol may increase your risk of overdose which can lead to coma or sudden death. It is, therefore, essential to consult your doctor about any concerns before taking citalopram and alcohol.

Any time you take medication, you are subject to potential side effects. Celexa and alcohol have specific side effects, which, when consumed together, may intensify certain side effects. Alcohol is a depressant, and combining it with a powerful antidepressant like Celexa can seriously affect your health. The FDA warns of using Celexa and alcohol due to side effects that can lead to overdose and sudden death.<sup>5</sup>

9 severe side effects of Celexa and alcohol, when taken together, include:<sup>4</sup>

1. Hyperventilation: Drinking alcohol while taking Celexa can lead to panic attacks where emotions of anxiety are amplified. This panic may lead to a person experiencing shortness of breath and feeling detached from reality.
2. Heart Issues: Taking Celexa doses over 40 mg may cause heart damage. Adding alcohol on top of the medication may further worsen the condition leading to severe heart problems.
3. Irregular Heart Rate: Normal heart rate is mainly impacted when combining Celexa and alcohol. The combination of the substances may be linked to torsades de pointes, leading to irregular heart rates.
4. Death: Overdosing on Celexa while consuming alcohol can be hazardous to your heart. Mixing alcohol and Celexa can lead to heart problems which may result in an irregular heart rate that can lead to sudden death.
5. Suicidal Ideation: Young adults who take Celexa to treat depression are at an increased risk of having suicidal thoughts. The condition worsens when Celexa is taken together with alcohol since both substances can cause an increased risk of suicidal ideation.<sup>6</sup>
6. Low Sodium: Celexa can lead to hyponatremia or low sodium within the first few weeks. This condition may worsen when you consume alcohol due to the substances inhibiting norepinephrine reuptake.
7. Amnesia: Celexa and alcohol can have side effects of memory loss and loss of consciousness. Taking the two substances together can worsen the condition leading to amnesia.
8. Coma: Using alcohol with Celexa increase your risk of overdosage of Celexa. This can lead to a coma or sudden death.
9. Convulsions: Combining Celexa and alcohol will likely make a person have uncontrollable shaking with rapid and rhythmic muscle contraction.

## Can You Ever Drink While Taking Celexa?

Drinking any alcohol while taking Celexa is discouraged. If you feel the urge to take alcohol while on Celexa medication, you should talk with your doctor first. It is important not to skip doses of Celexa as it may impact the treatment of your condition. According to the FDA, the negative interactions come from alcohol's effect on Celexa, and Celexa does not influence the effects of alcohol.<sup>5</sup>

Celexa has a half-life of approximately 35 hours, meaning it will take 35 hours for half of the

antidepressant to exit your system and about one week for the entire drug to leave your system. This knowledge is vital because if you stop the medication, but the drug's half-life is not yet over, you are still at risk of alcohol interacting with the Celexa in your system. Additionally, it may induce increased withdrawal effects as it leaves your system, which includes anxiety, irritability, and dizziness.

## Can Celexa & Alcohol Kill You?

While on Celexa medication, a person is encouraged not to mix Celexa with alcohol as it can lead to serious side effects, including a coma or sudden death. Combining Celexa or other SSRI antidepressants with alcohol may increase the risk of adverse effects such as serotonin syndrome and Long QT syndrome. Serotonin syndrome can occur when there is increased serotonin in the nervous system and can result in organ failure, heart problems, and sudden death. Older people are at greater risk of experiencing possible side effects of Celexa, leading to death. These chances of death can worsen, especially if they engage in [binge drinking](#).<sup>7</sup>

## Alcoholism & Depression

Alcohol is a depressant. Continued drinking of alcohol can harm your brain and worsen your depression. Heavy and continuous alcohol consumption changes your brain chemistry, leading to alcohol dependency (i.e., [alcoholism](#)).<sup>3</sup> This condition also leads to [major depressive disorder](#) and anxiety, increasing a lack of control over the amount of alcohol they consume as it is an escape from powerful emotions and may cause them to withdraw from normal daily activities.

Therefore, you or your loved one should address alcohol consumption before starting Celexa medication. Seeking medical advice from a doctor is crucial, as a lack of knowledge on the side effects of combining Celexa and alcohol leads most individuals with alcoholism to misuse their medication.

## Overdose Symptoms With Celexa & Alcohol

If you or a caregiver think you may be experiencing an overdose of Celexa, from Celexa alone or by mixing it with alcohol, you should call 9-1-1 or visit the nearest hospital as soon as possible. This immediate action will help prevent the side effects from worsening, possibly leading to death.

As a therapist, it can be challenging to address overdose symptoms with [high-functioning alcoholics](#) who may spend most of their time thinking about the positives of their drinking.<sup>8</sup> Due to this, it becomes a significant challenge for doctors to address overdose risk, as most high-functioning alcoholics are easily agitated, nervous, and likely to experience withdrawal symptoms when they attempt to stop.

Symptoms of an overdose of Celexa and alcohol can include:<sup>9</sup>

- Nausea
- Sleeping problems
- Convulsions
- Hyperventilation
- Sweating
- Vomiting

- Heart issues
- Irregular heart rate
- Amnesia

## When to Get Help

If you are in great danger because of mixing alcohol with Celexa, you should seek immediate medical attention from your doctor or the nearest hospital. A doctor will be able to direct proper medication to address your condition of a possible overdose. They can manage a Celexa overdose through symptomatic and supportive care, including ventilator support and observation for cardiac abnormalities.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, mixing other substances with alcohol and Celexa increases the risk of feeling nervous, insomnia, headaches, and nausea.

Cross-addiction and risk of substance abuse disorders can be significant problems when addressing the dangers of drinking on Celexa. In addition to possibly misusing Celexa and alcohol, people with cross-addictions may be more likely to engage in compulsive patterns and abuse multiple substances while still taking Celexa.<sup>10, 11</sup> These disorders can occur concurrently or replace another, making it hard to address the problem of alcohol alone. You will need treatment for a co-occurring condition if using multiple substances while taking Celexa becomes a prevalent issue.

## Questions to Ask Your Health Care Team

Questions to ask your care team include:

1. What would happen if I suddenly stopped taking Celexa?
2. I want to drink while taking Celexa. Should I be concerned?
3. What would happen if I combined both Celexa and alcohol?
4. Is there medication for anxiety and depression that is not negatively affected by alcohol?
5. I stopped taking Celexa but continued to drink alcohol. Am I at risk of the substance's side effects?
6. If I am done with my Celexa, how soon can I start drinking alcohol?
7. What would I do if I decided to drink alcohol and had an adverse reaction?
8. Should someone stop taking Celexa for the day if they want to drink?
9. Can I skip my Celexa medication?
10. If someone wants to finish their Celexa medication faster, should I take multiple pills?
11. Is there a safe amount of alcohol I can consume with Celexa?
12. Are there other risks a person can experience when mixing Celexa with other substances apart from alcohol?

## Final Thoughts

Celexa is a brand name for the drug citalopram. It is the class of SSRIs used to treat depression and other mental illnesses. You should take this antidepressant medication under the doctor's prescription. Taking Celexa will result in symptoms including vomiting, sweating, and nausea. The FDA warns against using alcohol with Celexa. Alcohol is an antidepressant with risks that, combined with Celexa,

will worsen the side effects. This is due to its side effects, including serotonin syndrome, QT syndrome, irregular heart rate, and convulsions. These symptoms can be severe, resulting in sudden death.

## Additional Resources

*Education is just the first step on our path to improved mental health and emotional wellness. To help our readers take the next step in their journey, Choosing Therapy has partnered with leaders in mental health and wellness. Choosing Therapy may be compensated for referrals by the companies mentioned below.*

Brightside Health (Online Psychiatry) – If you’re struggling with serious mental health issues, finding the right medication can make a difference. [Brightside Health](#) treatment plans start at \$95 per month. Cigna and Aetna accepted. Following a free online evaluation and receiving a prescription, you can get FDA approved medications delivered to your door. [Free Assessment](#)

Hims / Hers (Online Psychiatry) – If you’re living with anxiety, depression, OCD, or PTSD finding the right medication match may make all the difference. Get FDA approved medication prescribed by your dedicated [Hims / Hers](#) Healthcare Provider and delivered right to your door. Plans start at \$25 per month (first month). [Get Started](#)

BetterHelp (Online Therapy) – [BetterHelp](#) has over 20,000 licensed therapists who provide convenient and affordable online therapy. BetterHelp starts at \$60 per week. [Complete a brief questionnaire](#) and get matched with the right therapist for you. [Get Started](#)

*Choosing Therapy partners with leading mental health companies and is compensated for referrals by Brightside, Hims / Hers, and BetterHelp*

## For Further Reading

- [15 Best Books on Alcoholism and Recovery](#)
- [10 Best Depression Podcasts](#)
- [10 Eye-Opening & Inspiring Movies About Depression](#)
- [15 Best Depression Blogs](#)
- [21 Books on Depression: Helpful Resources for When You Feel Depressed](#)
- [15 YouTube Channels for Anxiety](#)
- [How to Get Antidepressants: Everything You Need to Know](#)
- [How to Get Anxiety Medication: Everything You Need to Know](#)

11 sources

## Recent Articles

- [About Us](#)

- Contact Us
- Write for Us
- Careers

- Editorial Policy
- Advertising Policy
- Privacy Policy
- Terms of Service
- No Surprises Act

FOR IMMEDIATE HELP CALL:

MEDICAL EMERGENCY: SUICIDE HOTLINE: SEE MORE CRISIS HOTLINES

911

800-273-8255

HERE



FOR IMMEDIATE HELP CALL:

MEDICAL EMERGENCY: SUICIDE HOTLINE: SEE MORE CRISIS HOTLINES

911

800-273-8255

HERE

This site complies with the HONcode standard for trustworthy health information:  
verify here.