

A deadly combination

Follow these safety rules



- Do not drink and drive, as even a small amount of alcohol can cause harm
- If you are in a group, designate a driver who will not drink
- If you are under the influence of alcohol, call a taxi or auto to reach your destination
- Wear your helmet, seat belt and do not speed



GRAPHICS: S. BELMANN

This festive season, if you plan to drive after a few swigs of your drink, don't. Alcohol consumption is a well-established cause and risk factor for road crashes, leading to death and long-term disabilities.

G. Gururaj, professor and Head of the Department of Epidemiology and the WHO Collaborating Centre for Injury Prevention and Safety Promotion, says alcohol affects the individual's functioning. "Even in relatively small amounts, it increases the risk of being involved in a crash. It has been demonstrated that alcohol intake leads to poor judgment, slow reaction, delayed reflexes, poor visual attention, improper coordination and difficulties in identifying dangers on roads, thereby affecting the person's driving."

Besides, the pseudo-euphoric effect of alcohol makes a person less inhibitive, and they tend to drive faster and more rashly, Dr. Gururaj says. "Even in hospitals, it is difficult to manage an injured person who is under the influence of alcohol as it presents difficulties in assessment and management."

Pratima Murthy, professor of

psychiatry and in-charge of the Centre for Addiction Medicine at NIMHANS, explains how people who drive under the influence of alcohol usually have low risk perception. "Alcohol causes dissociation between the person's thinking ability and actions. When the person is doing a routine task such as driving without any interference, it may reinforce the belief that driving under the influence of alcohol is without any risk. However, when it comes to making a decision such as applying brakes of the vehicle, motor coordination can be impaired resulting in a crash," Dr. Murthy says.

She adds that for every death, nearly 30 to 40 people are hospitalised with severe injuries and most of them live with lifelong disabilities. "Most road crash victims have injury to the brain and nervous system," she says.

The experts advise people to be safe on roads. Government agencies should also take responsibility in reducing drunken driving by strict enforcement of rules, they add.

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