

Alcohol + Diabetes

As a general rule, there is no need to avoid alcohol because you have diabetes.

You should not drink alcohol if you:

- Are pregnant or trying to get pregnant
- Are breastfeeding
- Have a personal or family history of drinking problems
- Are planning to drive or engage in other activities that require attention or skill
- Are taking certain medications. Ask your pharmacist about your medications.

Health risks of alcohol use?

You may have heard that alcohol has certain health benefits. However, any pattern of drinking can be harmful. Proven ways of improving your health include: healthy eating, being active, and being a non-smoker.

The Association's Clinical Practice Guidelines recommend that:

- People using insulin or insulin secretagogues should be aware of delayed hypoglycemia (low blood glucose) that can occur up to 24 hours after drinking alcohol.
- People with type 1 diabetes should be aware of the risk of morning hypoglycemia if alcohol is consumed 2 to 3 hours after the previous evening's meal.
- Alcohol should be limited to 2 standard drinks/day or less than 10 drinks/week for women and less than 3 standard drinks/day or less than 15 drinks/week for men. People with diabetes should discuss alcohol use with their diabetes healthcare team. Risks for people with diabetes

Alcohol can:

- affect judgement
- provide empty calories that might lead to weight gain if taken in excess
- increase blood pressure and triglycerides
- cause damage to liver and nerves including brain and sexual organs
- contribute to inflammation of the pancreas
- dehydrate the body which is very dangerous in someone with high blood glucose
- worsen eye disease

For young people in particular, alcohol use:

- can lead to addiction
- is associated with a dramatic increase in injuries and death

For those on insulin or some diabetes medications

BEFORE Drinking alcohol

Eat regular meals, take your medication(s), and check your blood glucose levels frequently (keep your blood glucose meter with you).

- Always have a treatment for low blood glucose with you (such as 3 glucose tablets or $\frac{3}{4}$ cup regular pop or 6 Life Savers®).
- Wherever you are, make sure someone with you knows your signs and symptoms of low blood glucose and how to treat it so they can help you.
- Be aware that glucagon, a treatment for low blood glucose, will not work while alcohol is in the body. Because of this, make sure that someone knows to call an ambulance if you pass out.
- Wear diabetes identification such as a MedicAlert® bracelet.

WHILE Drinking alcohol

- Eat carbohydrate-rich foods when drinking alcohol.
- Eat extra carbohydrate-rich foods if you are dancing, playing sports or doing other physical activity.
- Always pour your own drinks. Use less alcohol and stretch your drinks with sugar-free mixes.
- Drink slowly. Make your second drink without alcohol.

AFTER Drinking alcohol

- Tell a responsible person that you have been drinking. They should look for low blood glucose symptoms.
- Check your blood glucose before going to bed. Eat a carbohydrate snack if your blood glucose is lower than usual.
- Set an alarm or have a responsible person wake you up through the night and early morning
 - o a delayed low blood glucose can occur anytime up to 24 hours after drinking alcohol.
- You need to get up on time the next day for any food, medication or insulin you normally take. Missed medication or insulin can lead to high blood glucose, ketones and diabetic ketoacidosis (DKA).

The bottom line

- If you do not drink alcohol, don't start.
- If you choose to drink alcohol, intake should be moderate (daily intake should be limited to 2-3 drinks for adult men and 1-2 drinks for adult women). When drinking alcohol, make sure you know how to prevent and treat low blood glucose.
- Heavy alcohol drinkers (more than 3 drinks daily) are strongly advised to reduce the amount of alcohol they drink. Heavy alcohol use can make blood glucose control more difficult and increases other health risks.
- Talk to your diabetes educator or healthcare professional if you have questions.