

Alcohol and Diabetes

Key Points:

- If you do not drink alcohol, don't start.
- Do not drink alcohol if you are pregnant, planning on becoming pregnant, breastfeeding, plan to drive or take any medications where alcohol is not recommended.
- If you choose to drink alcohol, **drink in moderation**: 1 drink/day for women, 2 drinks/day for men
- **One standard drink**: Beer 5% 12oz, Wine 12% 5oz or Spirit 40% 1.5oz
- When drinking alcohol, make sure you know how to prevent and treat hypoglycemia.
- Be aware of **delayed hypoglycemia up to 24 hours after drinking alcohol**.
- Hypoglycemia can be mistaken as intoxication.
- Glucagon, a treatment for low blood sugar, may not work while alcohol is in your body.
- Do not take extra meal-time insulin for the carbohydrates in alcohol.
- Wear **MedicAlert** identification when drinking.
- Heavy alcohol drinkers (>3 drinks/day) are strongly recommended to **reduce their alcohol intake**.
- Heavy drinking can make blood sugar control more difficult and increase other health risks.
- **Health risks of alcohol**: weight gain, hypertension, high triglycerides, liver/nerve/pancreas damage, dehydration, addiction, and impaired judgment
- Talk to your diabetes educator or healthcare professional if you have any questions.

Risk of Hypoglycemia

The **liver** is the organ that breaks down alcohol. It is also responsible for releasing sugar for the body to use when you're not eating. The liver is not able to release sugar when it is busy digesting alcohol. This is why drinking alcohol can increase your risk of experiencing low blood sugars especially if you take insulin or oral medications that cause insulin to be released (ex. glunorm, glyburide or diamicron).

- Be aware of **delayed hypoglycemia** that can occur up to 24 hours after drinking alcohol.
- Be aware of morning hypoglycemia if alcohol is consumed 2-3 hours after your dinner
- Even small amounts of alcohol may impair your ability to detect the onset of hypoglycemia.
- **Before drinking** → eat regularly, check your blood sugars, try to bring a companion with you who is not drinking to monitor you for hypoglycemia, carry low treatment on you, and wear diabetes identification such as MedicAlert bracelet
- Glucagon, a treatment for low blood sugar, may not work while alcohol is in your body. Make sure that someone with you knows to call an ambulance should you pass out.
- **While Drinking** → eat carbohydrate rich foods, do not take extra meal-time or rapid insulin for the carbohydrate content in alcohol, pour your own drinks, drink water between alcohol
- **After drinking** → check your blood sugars before going to bed, eat a carbohydrate snack if your blood sugar is lower than usual, tell a responsible person you have been drinking so they can watch for symptoms of hypoglycemia, set an alarm to check your blood sugar through the night.
- **Wake up the next day on time** to take food, medication, or insulin you normally take. Missing your medication or insulin can lead to high blood glucose, ketones, and even DKA