

Alcohol and Diabetes

As a general rule, there is no need to avoid alcohol because you have diabetes. If your diabetes is well controlled, you have no other health problems that can be worsened by alcohol, and you know how to treat low blood sugars, it should be ok for you to drink alcohol in moderation.

Moderation means consuming no more than 1 standard drink per day if you are a woman, and no more than 2 standard drinks per day if you are a man. These recommendations are the same for people without diabetes.

One Standard Drink = 12oz. beer, 4oz. wine, or 1.5oz. 40% alcohol spirits.

Risk of Hypoglycemia

If you take insulin or insulin secretagogues (ex. GlucoNorm) drinking alcohol can increase your risk of experiencing low blood sugars.

- Be aware of **delayed hypoglycemia** 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 2-3 hours after you eat your evening meal.
- Alcohol should be limited to 1-2 drinks/day.
- Even small amounts of alcohol may impair someone's ability to detect the onset of hypoglycemia and therefore take appropriate action to correct it.
- Others may mistake the symptoms of hypoglycemia for intoxication.
- Alcohol can impair the hormonal regulatory responses to low blood sugars.

BEFORE Drinking Alcohol

- Eat regular meals, take your medication(s), and check your blood sugar levels often.
- Always have a treatment for low blood sugar with you.
- Be aware that glucagon, a treatment for low blood sugar, may not work while alcohol is in your 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 or necklace.

WHILE Drinking Alcohol

- Eat carbohydrate rich foods while drinking alcohol.
- Always pour your own drinks. Use less alcohol and stretch your drinks with sugar-free mixes.
- Drink slowly, and have drinks that do not contain alcohol inbetween.

AFTER Drinking Alcohol

- Tell a responsible person that you have been drinking so they can watch for symptoms of low blood sugar.
- Check your blood sugar before going to bed. Eat a carbohydrate snack if your blood sugar is lower than usual.
- Set an alarm or have a responsible person wake you up through the night and early morning – delayed hypoglycemia can occur **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. Missing your medication or insulin can lead to high blood glucose, ketones, and even DKA.

Key Points:

- If you do not drink alcohol, don't start.
- If you choose to drink alcohol, drink in moderation (1 drink/day for women, 2 drinks/day for men).
- When drinking alcohol, make sure you know how to prevent and treat hypoglycemia.
- 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.
- **Talk to you diabetes educator or healthcare professional if you have any questions**