



Alcohol and Your Diabetes

Can I still drink alcohol?

A small amount of alcohol will do no harm and can be enjoyed. Now you have diabetes, the general advice on drinking remains the same as for everyone else. However, there are some precautions you should take for your own safety and the safety of others.

How can alcohol affect diabetes?

Alcohol and the Liver

Your liver is an important part of your body with many functions. One of these is to store glucose and then release it into your bloodstream when your blood sugar level falls. Your liver is unable to release glucose into your bloodstream if you have consumed too much alcohol.

Alcohol and Hypos

If your diabetes is treated with insulin or some types of tablets, drinking alcohol may cause your blood sugar levels to fall further and you may experience a low blood sugar reaction (a hypo).

Remember your judgment may be affected when you drink. You may not recognise that your blood glucose levels are low. Make sure that your friends know about hypos.

Hypoglycaemia and the effects of alcohol can be confused with each other. Always wear or carry diabetes information (a bracelet, necklace or ID card.)

- Keep to sensible drinking levels.
- You could alternate an alcoholic drink with a low calorie soft drink.
- Don't drink on an empty stomach. Enjoy a meal before or with alcohol.
- Always carry glucose tablets or sweets with you.

Alcohol and Calories

Alcohol contains calories, so think about cutting back if you are trying to lose weight.

Alcohol and Insulin

Check with your diabetes team about adjusting your insulin.

Remember hypos can happen some hours after a drinking session: even into the next morning. Check your blood sugar level and always have a snack before you go to sleep.

Check your blood sugar level in the morning too.

Other Information about Alcohol

Extra strength lagers contain much more alcohol than ordinary lagers. Low alcohol beers, lagers and ciders vary enormously in their alcohol content. They can be virtually alcohol free (0.05%) or contain 1/3 the amount of alcohol as similar drinks of ordinary strength. Low alcohol drinks tend to be higher in sugar than ordinary strength drinks.

Low sugar beers and lagers are higher in alcohol content and are not recommended (e.g. Diet Pils), especially if you are on insulin. Choose ordinary varieties of beer or lager. Know your sensible drinking limits.

A sensible drinking limit for people with (and without) diabetes is

For Men No more than 3 units per day = 21 units per week

For Women No more than 2 units per day = 14 units per week

One or two alcohol-free days a week are a good habit for everyone. In recent years the alcohol content of many drinks has increased. A pub measure (25 ml) of a spirit or half a pint of ordinary beer is one unit. A pint of premium lager can contain as much as three units, and a small glass of wine (175 ml), around two units.

Remember

- **Some alcohol-free drinks may be high in glucose and calories. Keep your alcohol intake down if you want to lose or maintain your weight – alcohol is high in calories.**
- **Avoid drinks that are high in sugar (carbohydrate) e.g. sweet sherry, sweet wine, liqueurs and alco-pops.**
- **Mixer drinks and soft drinks should be diet, sugar free or low calorie.**
- **Choose ordinary varieties of beer and lager.**
- **Low alcohol drinks may contain more alcohol than you think.**
- **Low alcohol beers or lagers tend to have a higher sugar content .**
- **Low sugar beers or lagers tend to have a higher alcohol content.**

DON'T DRINK AND DRIVE

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