

Diabetes and Alcohol

If you have diabetes, be careful with alcohol. Alcohol can affect your blood sugar (glucose) level. It can also increase health risks. Before drinking any alcohol, talk with your doctor. He or she can help you decide if you can drink safely. Read more about the risks of drinking alcohol below. And learn tips for staying safe when you drink.

How alcohol affects your diabetes

Here's how alcohol can affect your health if you have diabetes:

- **It can make some health problems worse.** Alcohol may worsen disease of the liver, kidney, or pancreas. It may make nerve or eye damage more likely. It can also increase your blood pressure and triglycerides. If you have any of these health problems, your doctor will likely tell you not to drink alcohol.
- **It can raise your risk for low blood sugar (hypoglycemia).** The liver helps prevent low blood sugar. It does so by releasing more glucose into the blood. Alcohol in the blood stops the liver from doing this. Low blood sugar is more likely if you drink alcohol on an empty stomach. Or if you have alcohol during or right after exercise. It's also more likely if you take insulin or medicines that help lower blood sugar. Also, alcohol may mask symptoms of low blood sugar. This may keep you from getting needed treatment.
- **It can raise your risk for high blood sugar (hyperglycemia).** Many alcoholic drinks have carbohydrates (carbs). These include beers, sweet wines, and drinks mixed with fruit juices or sugar. Carbs raise blood sugar levels higher and faster than other kinds of foods. Drinking may harm your ability to watch your carbs. Check your blood sugar more often when drinking alcohol.
- **It can affect how well you manage your weight.** Alcohol is high in calories and has no nutrition. If you're on a meal plan to help control your weight, you'll need to count alcohol as part of your daily calorie intake. A standard drink is often counted as 90 calories or 2 fat exchanges. Also alcohol can make you feel hungrier than normal. This makes you more likely to overeat. This can affect your weight and blood sugar.

Tips for safer drinking

Your doctor may say it's OK to drink in moderation. Here are some steps you can take to drink safely:

- Strictly follow the drink limits from your doctor. Or use the American Diabetes Association guidelines below.
- Check your blood sugar before drinking. Don't drink if your blood sugar is too low or too high. Also check your blood sugar after drinking. Or before going to bed. Alcohol can stay in the blood for many hours after drinking. If your blood sugar is low or dropping,

you may be able to treat it with a snack or glucose tablet before it gets worse. In low or limited amounts, alcohol can make your body more sensitive to how insulin works.

- If you count carbs, don't count calories from alcohol. It's not a substitute for healthy food.
- Ask your provider how alcohol affects insulin or any medicines you take.
- Don't drink on an empty stomach.
- Don't drink during or after exercise.
- Don't drink and drive.
- Choose drinks lower in alcohol, calories, and carbs. Choices include dry wines and light beers. Or mixed drinks with sugar-free juice, club soda, or sparkling water.
- Carry a medical ID that says you have diabetes. This helps make sure that you get the right treatment, if needed.