

# Alcohol

## + diabetes



Consider the following questions when deciding what is best for you.

	YES	NO
1 Is my diabetes under control?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2 Am I free from health problems that alcohol can make worse such as disease of the pancreas, eye disease, high blood pressure, high triglycerides, liver problems, nerve damage or stroke?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3 Do I know how to prevent and treat low blood glucose?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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.

- **If you answered “no” to any of these questions**, you should speak to your diabetes educator or healthcare professional before drinking alcohol.
- **If you answered “yes” to all of these questions**, it is OK to drink alcohol in moderation. *Moderate alcohol intake is 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.* This recommendation is the same for people without diabetes.

## 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

Drinking alcohol can increase your risk of having low blood glucose. To reduce this risk, take the following steps:

## 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. Some ideas:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 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. (eg. \_\_\_\_\_ )
- 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 – 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).



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## What is a "standard drink"?

**1 standard drink (13.6 g of alcohol):**



### Beer

360 mL (12 fl.oz) of regular strength beer (5% alcohol)



### Spirits

45 mL (1.5 fl.oz) of spirits (40% alcohol)



### Wine

150 mL (5 fl.oz) of wine (12% alcohol)

**Note:** If you are carbohydrate counting, do not take insulin for the carbohydrate content of alcoholic drinks.

## Carbohydrate and calorie content in some common alcoholic beverages and mixes *(The amounts listed are a general guide only)*

Beverage	Standard serving size	Energy (kcal)	Carbohydrate content (g)
<b>Beer:</b> regular	341 mL (12 fl.oz)	147	12
light	341 mL (12 fl.oz)	99	5
non-alcoholic*	355 mL (~12 fl.oz)	50-80	11-17
low carb*	341 mL (12 fl.oz)	92	3
<b>Spirits/Hard liquor:</b>	45 mL (1.5 fl.oz)	98	0
<b>Liqueurs &amp; Cordials:</b>	45 mL (1.5 fl.oz)	155-190	10-25
<b>Wine:</b> regular	150 mL (5 fl.oz)	123-127	1-4
dessert	150 mL (5 fl.oz)	232	23
non-alcoholic	150 mL (5 fl.oz)	9	1
<b>Cooler:</b> regular	355 mL (12 fl.oz)	178-258	21-38
light*	330 mL (12 fl.oz)	100	1
<b>Mixes:</b>			
Sugar free pop	250 mL (8 fl.oz)	0	0
Regular pop	250 mL (8 fl.oz)	88-99	23-25
Club soda	250 mL (8 fl.oz)	0	0
Tonic water	250 mL (8 fl.oz)	88	23
Orange juice	250 mL (8 fl.oz)	118	27
Tomato juice	250 mL (8 fl.oz)	44	11
Tomato and clam juice <sup>†</sup>	250 mL (8 fl.oz)	123	28

Reference: Canadian Nutrient File, 2010; USDA, 2011; \*Actual Label

The caloric and carbohydrate content may vary by brand, be sure to check the labels

## 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.

*Across the country, the Canadian Diabetes Association is leading the fight against diabetes by helping people with diabetes live healthy lives while we work to find a cure. Our community-based network of supporters help us provide education and services to people living with diabetes, advocate for our cause, break ground towards a cure and translate research into practical applications.*

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