

Diabetes and alcohol

Information for patients and families

Is it safe for me to drink alcohol?

If your blood sugar and cholesterol are well controlled, drinking alcohol in moderation is okay. Health Canada and the Canadian Diabetes Association recommend drinking no more than:

Men: 3 drinks or less per day, or less than 15 drinks per week

Women: 2 drinks or less per day, or less than 10 drinks per week

1 drink = 12 ounces beer or 5 ounces wine or 1½ ounces liquor

What is the risk when drinking alcohol?

If you take insulin or certain types of diabetes medicines, drinking alcohol can make your blood sugar go too low (hypoglycemia). Your blood sugar can go low up to 24 hours after drinking.

Why does drinking alcohol cause low blood sugar?

The liver releases sugar into your blood to make sure your brain always has some energy between your meals and overnight. Your liver also breaks down alcohol to remove it from your body. When your liver is breaking down alcohol, it releases less sugar and your blood sugar can go too low.



Drinking alcohol impairs your judgment, so you may not be able to tell if your blood sugar is low. Make sure you test your blood sugar often, tell a friend and wear a medic alert bracelet.

How can I prevent hypoglycemia when I am drinking?

Here are a few tips to help prevent hypoglycemia after drinking. Speak to your diabetes team to help with specific tips for you.

- Have some carbohydrate snacks while you are drinking.
- After each alcoholic drink, have a drink without alcohol. This can prevent drinking too much.
- Check your blood sugar at bedtime and through the night to make sure your blood sugar is not going too low.
- You may want to have a snack before bed to be safe, especially if you had more alcohol than usual, less carbohydrate or more activity.
- If you need to correct a high blood sugar before bed, consider reducing the dose.

A few more tips for when you drink

- Make sure somebody you are with knows that you have diabetes. This person should know the signs of low blood sugar and how to treat a low blood sugar.
- Always carry fast acting sugar to treat a low blood sugar (for example: sugar tablets, juice, pop or pure sugar).
- Wear a medic alert ID.
- Mix alcohol with sugar free beverages to prevent your blood sugar from going too high (for example: water, club soda, diet pop or diet cranberry juice).

St. Michael's cares about your health. For reliable health information, visit our Patient and Family Learning Centre, Room 6-004, 6th floor, Cardinal Carter Wing, or find us online at www.stmichaelshospital.com/learn

This information is not intended as a substitute for professional medical care. Ask your healthcare provider about this information if you have questions.

73046 Dev. Apr18 2016 V1

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