

# Alcohol and diabetes

## Is it OK to drink?

Yes, as long as your diabetes is well managed. Drink in moderation. You can follow the general guidelines for adults, if your diabetes is well managed:

- 2 drinks a day for men under ages 21-65
- 1 drink for women
- 1 drink per day for anyone over 65



## What happens when I drink?

Drinking raises your risk of low blood sugar (hypoglycemia). While your liver processes the alcohol, it is not able to move sugar into the blood if your blood sugar begins to drop.

## Manage your blood sugar while you drink

**Don't drink after exercise.** Exercise lowers blood glucose levels. Drinking will reduce them even more.

**Eat food.** Have a well-balanced meal before you drink, and snack while you drink. Your body will need the glucose, because your liver will stop making glucose once you start drinking.

**Check the alcohol level.** Make sure that mixed drinks are measured correctly. Take into account the added calories and carbs in juices, sodas, and other mixers. Check the proof of spirits and the alcohol level of beers and wines.

**Be ready for low blood sugar.** Make sure you have a high carb snack with you in case your blood glucose level dips below 65-70 mg/dl. Glucagon will not treat alcohol-induced hypoglycemia. Bring along your testing supplies and check your levels often.

**Bring a buddy.** Low blood sugar can look like drunkenness. Make sure that your friend knows that you have diabetes and can recognize the signs of hypoglycemia. Ask them to call for help if you start vomiting or pass out.

**Snack before bed.** Because it takes about 2 hours for just 1 oz of alcohol to leave your system, the risk of low blood sugar continues long after you've emptied your glass. Your blood sugar levels may crash in the middle of the night. Set your alarm to wake up after a few hours to check your blood glucose and have another snack.



## When to say NO

Avoid alcohol if you are pregnant or have diabetes complications.

Say no if these apply to you:

**Neuropathy:** Heavy or ongoing drinking can cause nerve damage or make existing nerve damage worse.

**High triglyceride levels (>200 mg/dl):** Alcohol slows the liver's ability to clear fat from the blood and increases triglyceride production.

**High blood pressure:** Alcohol can raise blood pressure levels.

**Hypoglycemic unawareness:** People with this may not feel low blood sugar until it is too late.

**Certain medications:** Check with your pharmacist or doctor to see if you take a medicine that cannot be taken with alcohol.