



40480

Diabetes and Alcohol Consumption

If you have diabetes, you need to be careful with alcohol. Alcohol can affect how well you control your blood sugar (glucose) level. It can also increase risks to your health. Before choosing to drink alcohol, discuss it with your healthcare provider (HCP). He or she can help you decide whether you can drink safely. This sheet tells you more about risks of drinking alcohol. It also gives you tips for staying safe when you drink.

How Alcohol Can Affect Your Diabetes

Here are some of the ways alcohol can affect your health if you have diabetes:

- It can make certain health problems worse.** Alcohol may worsen disease of the liver, kidney, or pancreas. It may also make nerve or eye damage more likely. If you have any of these health problems, your HCP will likely advise you not to drink alcohol.
- It can increase your risk for low blood sugar (hypoglycemia).** The liver helps prevent low blood sugar by releasing extra glucose into the blood. Alcohol in the blood keeps the liver from doing this. Low blood sugar is more likely if you drink alcohol on an empty stomach or during or right after exercise. It is also more likely if you take insulin or medications that help lower blood sugar. Also, alcohol may affect your ability to tell whether you have symptoms of low blood sugar. This may keep you from getting needed treatment.
- It can increase your risk for high blood sugar (hyperglycemia).** Many alcoholic drinks contain carbohydrates (carbs). These include beers, sweeter wines, and drinks mixed with fruit juices or sugar. Carbs raise blood sugar levels higher and faster than other kinds of foods. Drinking may throw off your ability to monitor your carbs.
- It can affect how well you manage your weight.** Alcohol is high in calories and has no nutrition. If you are on a meal plan to help control your weight, you will need to count alcohol as part of your daily calorie intake. A standard drink is usually counted as 90 calories or two fat exchanges. In addition, alcohol can cause you to feel hungrier than normal. This makes you more likely to overeat, which can affect your weight and blood sugar level.



Tips for Safer Drinking

Your doctor may give you the okay to drink in moderation. Here are some steps you can take to drink safely:

- Strictly follow the drink limits given to you by your HCP. Or use the American Diabetes Association guidelines (see box below).
- Check your blood sugar level before drinking. Do not drink if your blood sugar level is too low or too high. Also, check your blood sugar level after drinking or before going to bed. This is because

alcohol can stay in the blood for many hours after drinking. If your blood sugar level is low or dropping, you may be able to treat it with a snack or glucose tablet before it worsens.

- Ask your HCP, including your pharmacist, how alcohol will affect insulin or any medications you take.
- Never drink on an empty stomach.
- Never drink during or after exercise.
- Do not drink any alcohol if you are going to drive.
- Be smart about what you drink. This means choosing drinks that are lower in alcohol, calories, and carbohydrates. Options include dry wines, light beers, or mixed drinks with sugar-free juice, club soda, or sparkling water.
- Carry medical ID that tells others you have diabetes. This helps ensure that you receive proper treatment, if needed.

American Diabetes Association Alcohol Guidelines

If your HCP has cleared you to drink, limit drinking to:

- Women: No more than 1 drink a day
- Men: No more than 2 drinks a day

One drink equals 12 ounces of beer, 5 ounces of wine, or 1.5 ounces of hard liquor.

© 2000-2012 Krames StayWell, 780 Township Line Road, Yardley, PA 19067. All rights reserved. This information is not intended as a substitute for professional medical care. Always follow your healthcare professional's instructions.