

## Alcohol and Diabetes (1 of 2)

The good news is as a general rule there is no need to give up alcohol just because you have diabetes. Guidelines are in line with the rest of the population of a daily maximum consumption of two units for women and three units for men (maximum weekly amount of 14 units for women and 21 units for men).

### How is alcohol measured?

Alcohol is measured in units. Drinks will have varying alcohol contents and therefore the volume will generally vary for each type of drink. Alcohol content is described as % vol (alcohol by volume)

One unit of alcohol is

- ★ Half a pint of beer, lager (3.5%)
- ★ 1 pub measure (25ml) of spirits (40%)
- ★ 1 small glass (125ml) of wine (9% - most wines are 11-13%)

### Alcohol and Blood Sugar

Alcohol is made from the fermentation of either sugar or starch. Pure alcohol alone does not raise the blood glucose but any remaining unfermented carbohydrate or extra sugar or fruit can have an effect. In general the principle concern with alcohol is the risk of hypoglycaemia either during the time of alcohol consumption or more usually 12-16 hours later. The risk of hypoglycaemia is also increased if you are more active than normal e.g. dancing, sex etc.

### Some advice . . . . .

- ★ Be aware that the alcoholic strengths of drinks can vary considerably with many drinks having increased in alcohol content over the years. Your drink may contain more units than you think.
- ★ Never drink on an 'empty stomach' as the alcohol will be absorbed too quickly into your blood stream.
- ★ Do not substitute alcoholic drinks for your usual meal or snacks as this may lead to a hypo.

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You are entitled to a copy of any letter we write about you. Please ask if you want one when you come to the hospital

We ask for information about you so that you can receive proper care and treatment. This information remains confidential and is stored securely by the Trust in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

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## ***Alcohol and Diabetes (2 of 2)***

- ★ Serious hypoglycaemia can occur with larger quantities of alcohol, particularly if you are treated with insulin and especially if too little carbohydrate is eaten. Always make sure you take some carbohydrate before going to bed after drinking. Useful snacks include toast, cereal and sandwiches, although chips or pizza on the way home may be an easier, albeit unhealthier, option.
- ★ Delayed hypoglycaemia may occur up to 16 hours after heavy drinking. It is vital you keep your blood glucose levels topped up with carbohydrate and always remember to take something at breakfast. Monitor your blood glucose levels closely. You may also need to consider taking less diabetes treatment with your subsequent breakfast.
- ★ All types of alcoholic drinks contain calories and can make you feel more hungry, so if you are watching your weight try to limit your intake to the occasional drink.
- ★ Remember you may be less aware of your hypo symptoms when you are drinking so always wear some form of diabetes identification as you and others may confuse a hypo with drunkenness.
- ★ Drinking low carbohydrate beers, eg Pils lager, and cider offers no benefit because of their higher alcohol content.
- ★ Low alcohol drinks can be useful if you are driving, but few are alcohol free, so remember if you drink enough of them you may still be over the limit.
- ★ Low alcohol wines are often higher in sugar than ordinary ones, so if you do choose these, just stick to a glass or two.
- ★ Drinks with a high sugar content, eg sweet sherries, 'alcopops', sweet wines and most liqueurs should be limited.
- ★ Mixer drinks need to be 'diet' or 'sugar free' such as diet tonic water and cola.
- ★ **Never drink and drive.**

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