

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. Diabetes Canada and The Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction (CCSA) recommends drinking no more than:

Men: 2 drinks or less per day, or less than 10 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). This may happen 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 how to recognize and treat a low blood sugar and wear a medic alert bracelet.

How can I prevent low blood sugar when I am drinking?

- Here are a few tips to help prevent hypoglycemia (low blood sugar) after drinking. Speak to your diabetes team to help with specific tips for you.
- Have some food that contains carbohydrate 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.
- Consider having a snack before bedtime.
- If you need to correct a low blood sugar before bedtime, consider reducing your dose of insulin.
- Consider reducing your dose of long-acting basal insulin at night or using a temporary basal rate overnight.

A few more tips for when you drink

- Make sure somebody you are with knows 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.
- 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 juice).