

Alcohol and Diabetes

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The following tips will help you understand the impact that [alcohol](#) has on [diabetes](#), and how to drink sensibly and still stay healthy. But before you do, you should first speak to your doctor or a registered dietitian nutritionist to make sure it is safe for you.

What is “**A safe amount of alcohol**”? No one would ever suggest to people who currently do not drink alcohol that they should pick up the habit. However, if you already drink alcohol, you must limit yourself to one or two drinks per day. A drink is:

- 12 fluid ounces (fl oz) of beer
- 5 fl oz of wine
- 1½ fl oz of 80-proof distilled spirits
- 1 fl oz of 100-proof distilled spirits



Individuals who absolutely should not drink: It is recommended that people with the following conditions abstain from alcohol consumption:

- If you tend to become hypoglycemic or were unable to recognize symptoms of hypoglycemia in the past.
- If you have diabetic complications, such as neuropathy or retinopathy, because alcohol is proven to worsen these conditions.
- If you have cardiovascular disease or high blood pressure, because alcohol consumption increases triglycerides and blood pressure, which increases the risk of heart disease and stroke. In addition, research has shown that there is an increased risk of heart attack and stroke in the 24 hours immediately following the consumption of alcohol. This risk is diminished after 24 hours for moderate drinkers, but remains high for heavy drinkers.
- If you are trying to lose weight, because alcohol is a concentrated source of calories and can increase appetite.

How to drink sensibly: The following suggestions can help you drink sensibly.

1. **Food:** Never drink alcohol on an empty stomach (make sure to consume at least 15 grams (g) of carbohydrate before or while having a drink such as a slice of bread or 4-5 crackers), and only drink alcohol if your blood glucose level is between 100-140 milligrams (mg)/deciliter (dL).
2. **Hours later:** Understand that alcohol can cause hypoglycemia for up to 12 hours after drinking.
3. **Fat servings:** Know that a drink generally counts as 2 fat servings.
4. **Blood sugar:** Test your blood glucose 1 or 2 hours after drinking and again before going to bed.
5. **Always wear your diabetes alert jewelry:** Symptoms of hypoglycemia and intoxication can mimic each other, making it less likely that you will receive the care that you need for hypoglycemia.
6. **Mixed drinks:** Avoid mixed drinks, such as margaritas and piña colodas. They contain an astounding amount of carbohydrates. They also can cause your blood glucose levels to swing wildly.
7. **Insulin and medications:** Know that insulin or medications, such as sulfonylureas or glitinides, increase the release of insulin and raise the risk of hypoglycemia. Metformin usually has a warning label about excessive alcohol intake because the combination of alcohol and the drug can lead to harmful lactic acid buildup in the blood.
8. **Do not exercise before drinking alcohol.** This will increase the likelihood of hypoglycemia.
9. **Number of drinks in a 24-hour period:** Do not drink more than two if you are male or one for females.
10. **Drink slowly and drink plenty of water.**

