

Department of Nutrition & Dietetics
Patient Information

Diabetes and alcohol

Information for people with diabetes

Please note: This is general information and should not replace any personalised advice given to you by your healthcare team.

Can I drink alcohol if I have diabetes?

The advice for people with diabetes is the same as for people without diabetes. However, there are some important points to remember:

- The risk of developing a range of illnesses (including, for example, cancers of the mouth, throat and breast) increases with any amount of alcohol you drink on a regular basis
- Alcohol is high in calories and if you are overweight, you should reduce your intake
- Low sugar beers such as Pils, Budweiser Light, contain more alcohol than normal beers and are best avoided
- If you have high blood pressure, alcohol is best avoided
- Drinking alcohol can make neuropathy (nerve damage) worse
- If you are drinking spirits, remember to have low calorie or sugar free mixers with these e.g. diet coke
- Do not exceed two units a day for women and men and no more than 14 units per week

One drink (unit) is equivalent to ½ pint of beer or lager (3-5-4.0%), or one pub measure (35ml) of spirits (40%) or one standard (125ml) glass of wine (8-9%)

The number of units will appear on labels. For example, there are four units in a large (440ml) can of strong lager (8-9%)

To work out accurately the number of units in your drink, the following equation can be applied (Note: ABV = alcohol by volume):

$$\frac{\text{Volume} \times \text{ABV}}{1000} = \text{number of units}$$

E.g. $\frac{250\text{ml (large glass of wine)} \times 13\% \text{ (volume of alcohol)}}{1000}$
= 3.25 units

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If you need this information in large print, easy read, on audiotape or in another language please call 0800 7838058 or e-mail pals@dchft.nhs.uk

If you wish to obtain a list of the sources used to develop this information leaflet please call 0800 7838058 or e-mail patient.info@dchft.nhs.uk

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Alcohol and hypoglycaemia

Alcohol can reduce your blood glucose levels as it interferes with your liver's ability to process glucose. Therefore alcohol can increase your chance of having a hypo (low blood glucose level), especially if you drink on an empty stomach. Here are a few points to remember:

- Ideally take your alcohol with a meal
- If you have been drinking in the evening, make sure you have a starchy bedtime snack e.g. toast, cereal. This will reduce your risk of having a hypo at night or the next morning
- Drinking late in the evening may lower your blood sugars during the next morning. Therefore, it may be appropriate to reduce your breakfast insulin dose* or take extra breakfast or a mid-morning snack
- Never drink on an empty stomach
- Always carry identification. Hypoglycaemia may be mistaken for drunkenness
- Ensure you carry items to treat a hypo

*Only adjust your dose if you feel safe to do so. Please contact your diabetes team for any help and advice.

Useful contacts

If you have questions, please ask a Diabetes Dietitian or Diabetes UK:

- Dorset County Hospital Diabetes Centre
Tel: **01305 255130**
Email: dietetic.secretary@dchft.nhs.uk
- Diabetes UK Careline
Tel: **0345 123 2399** (charges apply, see website for details)
Email: careline@diabetes.org.uk
- Drink Aware
Tel: **020 7766 9900**
www.drinkaware.co.uk