

Alcohol and Diabetes

Basic tips for safe use

This handout for people with diabetes gives basic tips on how to use alcohol safely.

Deciding Whether to Use Alcohol

Alcoholic drinks are often a part of social life. Before you decide whether or not to use alcohol, it is important to understand how it may affect your health. This is especially true for people with diabetes, since alcohol can lower blood glucose.

If you choose to drink, do so *in moderation*. If you do not drink, you do not need to start. Talk with your doctor, dietitian, or nurse if you have questions.

What does “in moderation” mean?

Your diabetes care team and the American Diabetes Association recommend that if you drink alcohol, drink only a moderate amount. “Moderate” means:

- For men: 1 to 2 drinks a day
- For women: 1 drink a day

One “drink” is defined as:

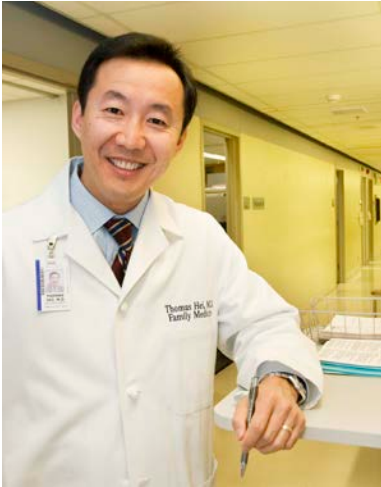
- 12 ounces of beer (light beer is best)
- 4 ounces of wine
- 2 ounces of dry sherry
- 1½ ounces of distilled spirits such as whiskey, rye, vodka, or gin



Talk with your doctor, dietitian, or nurse about alcohol use for people with diabetes.

How can alcohol affect blood glucose level?

Many people think alcohol raises blood glucose levels. But, if you take insulin or other diabetes medicines (such as glyburide, glipizide, or glimepiride) that lower blood glucose, **alcohol may cause your blood glucose to drop too low.**



Before you drink alcohol of any kind, talk with your doctor or pharmacist about the medicines you take.

If you are taking these kinds of diabetes medicines, **never drink alcohol on an empty stomach**. Eat a meal or a snack along with your drink. And, if you choose to drink, do so in moderation.

Drink with Caution and Carry Identification

Many of the signs and symptoms of low blood glucose are similar to being drunk. People around you might think you are a little “tipsy” when it is really low blood glucose that is affecting your behavior.

- When you drink alcohol, tell the people you are with that you have diabetes.
- Make sure the people you are with know how to treat low blood glucose.
- Always wear identification, such as medic alert jewelry, that says you have diabetes.

Alcohol Has Calories

- If you are trying to lose weight, know that alcoholic drinks add calories with no nutritional value. If you do drink, choose one of the lower-calorie options.
- If you do **not** take insulin or pills for your diabetes, reduce some of the fat and/or carbohydrate in your meals to allow for the calories you are getting from alcohol. (See “Fitting Alcohol into Your Meal Plan” on page 3.)
- If you take insulin, do **not** cut down on your food intake when you have an alcoholic drink. Sip your drink slowly and make it last a long time.

Some Medicines May Not Mix with Alcohol

Before you drink alcohol of any kind, talk with your doctor or pharmacist about your medicines. Mixing certain medicines with alcohol can be dangerous.



To avoid low blood glucose, always eat a meal or a snack when you drink alcohol.

Fitting Alcohol into Your Meal Plan

Beverage	Amount (ounces)	Calories	Carbohydrate (grams)
Light Beer			
• Most American brands	12	100 to 110	5 to 6
• “Ultra lite” beer	12	95	3
Lager			
• Most American brands	12	145 to 150	10 to 12
Ale			
• Most local micro-brews	12	160 to 190	13 to 15
Other			
• Hard lemonade	12	220	38
• Hard cider	12	200	25
• Stout	12	225	22
• Porter	12	195	18
• Guinness draught	12	125	10
• Non-alcoholic beer	12	50	10
Distilled Spirits			
• 86 proof (gin, rum, vodka, whisky, scotch, bourbon)	1½	105	trace
Wine			
• Red table or rosé	4	85	1
• Dry white	4	80	0.4
• Sweet wine	2	90	0.5
• Wine – calorie reduced	4	55	0.3
• Wine coolers	12	190	22
• Champagne	4	100	3.6
• Sherry	2	75	1.5
• Sweet sherry, port	2	95	7
• Vermouth, dry	3	105	4.2

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

Endocrine and Diabetes Care Center: 206.598.4882

UW Medicine Neighborhood Clinics: 206.520.5000