

Alcohol and diabetes? Yes, but in moderation!

Excessive alcohol consumption has a detrimental effect on cardiovascular and metabolic health, in general. Alcohol can also increase blood pressure, contribute to the accumulation of fat in your blood vessels and, consequently, increase the risk of heart attack and stroke.

When you have diabetes, drinking alcohol can also disrupt the management of your blood sugar levels. Alcohol consumption can cause hyperglycemia, a rise in blood sugar above normal levels, or hypoglycemia, a drop in blood sugar below normal levels.

Resources

Éduc'alcool
educalcool.qc.ca

Diabetes Québec
diabete.qc.ca

Become a member
of Diabetes Québec!



Questions about diabetes?

InfoDiabetes Service
514-259-3422, press 1
1-800-361-3504, press 1
infodiabete@diabete.qc.ca

Diabetes School
Universi D
universi-d.com

Diabetes  Québec
diabete.qc.ca

Diabetes  Québec

Drinking and diabetes

To drink alcohol safely when you have diabetes, you should:

- Always wear your medical ID bracelet.
- Always carry food with you to treat hypoglycemia.
- Let your companions know that hypoglycemia symptoms can mimic drunkenness.
- Let your companions know that glucagon is ineffective and that they should call an ambulance if you lose consciousness due to hypoglycemia.
- Always drink alcohol with food.
- Consume alcohol slowly and alternate it with alcohol-free beverages.
- Measure your blood sugar more often and don't forget to do so at bedtime.
- Have a bedtime snack containing carbohydrates and protein to prevent nighttime hypoglycemia, if needed.
- Be sure to get up at your normal time to eat breakfast the day after an evening of drinking and take your usual medication.
- Avoid alcohol before, during, and after physical activity.
- Don't take extra insulin for the carbohydrates in alcoholic drinks.

**Warning! Consuming alcohol
on an empty stomach can lead
to severe hypoglycemia.**

Alcohol and hyperglycemia

Many alcoholic beverages, including alcohol-based cocktails such as mojitos, piña coladas, daiquiris, cosmopolitans, contain sugar. Therefore, these drinks can cause your blood sugar levels to spike above normal levels immediately after drinking them.

Recommendations for alcohol consumption

Diabetes Canada and Éduc'alcool recommend:

For women:

- A maximum of 2 alcoholic drinks per day;
- Fewer than 10 drinks per week.

For men:

- A maximum of 3 alcoholic drinks per day;
- Fewer than 15 drinks per week.

They also recommend not drinking alcohol every day.

Carbohydrate content of some alcoholic drinks:

Type of beverage	Quantity (1 drink)	Carbohydrates (g)	Energy (Calories)
Beer (5% alcohol)	340 ml (12 oz.)	12	145
Light beer (4% alcohol)	340 ml (12 oz.)	5	100
Alcohol-free beer (0.5% alcohol)	340 ml (12 oz.)	12–18	60–85
Cognac	45 ml (1.5 oz.)	0	115
Cherry Brandy	45 ml (1.5 oz.)	15	125
Gin, rum, rye, scotch, vodka, whisky	45 ml (1.5 oz.)	0	100
Dry white wine (12% alcohol)	140 ml (5 oz.)	1	95
Sparkling wine, champagne	140 ml (5 oz.)	2	105
Dry red wine (12% alcohol)	140 ml (5 oz.)	2	100
Rosé wine	140 ml (5 oz.)	2	100
Port	85 ml (3 oz.)	10	130

Source : Adapted from the 2007 *Manuel de nutrition clinique de l'OPDQ* (Clinical Nutrition Handbook from the Ordre des diététistes-nutritionnistes du Québec).

Alcohol and hypoglycemia

When you drink alcohol, it's the liver that looks after eliminating it. To do this, the liver temporarily pauses its other tasks, including releasing sugar into the bloodstream when your blood sugar drops. **Drinking alcohol therefore increases the risk of hypoglycemia, and even more so if you have diabetes and are being treated with insulin or insulin secretagogues.** This effect can last up to 24 hours after consuming alcohol.

Warning:

Symptoms of hypoglycemia can be confused with or mimic drunkenness since they are similar. Be sure to mention this to your loved ones or companions so that they are prepared to take the necessary action in case of hypoglycemia!

Also, glucagon, the drug used to treat hypoglycemia with loss of consciousness, is not effective when the hypoglycemia is caused by alcohol. In such a situation, those around you need to contact emergency services to get you help as quickly as possible.

