

# Alcohol and Diabetes

Patient Information Leaflet



## CAN I STILL DRINK ALCOHOL?

Now you have diabetes, the general advice on drinking remains the same as for everyone else. However, there are some precautions you should take for your own safety and the safety of others.

## A SENSIBLE DRINKING LIMIT FOR PEOPLE WITH (AND WITHOUT) DIABETES IS:

### For Men:

No more than 3 units/day  
(no more than 14 units in a week)

### For Women:

No more than 2 units/day  
(no more than 14 units in a week)

Everyone should have at least one or two alcohol-free days a week.

In recent years the alcohol content of many drinks has increased. A pub measure (25 ml) of a spirit or half a pint of ordinary beer is one unit. A pint of premium lager can contain as much as three units, and a small glass of wine (175 ml), around two units.

## ALCOHOL AND CALORIES

Many alcoholic drinks are high in calories. You should think about cutting back if you are trying to lose weight.

## HOW CAN ALCOHOL AFFECT DIABETES?

### Alcohol and the Liver

Your liver is an important part of your body with many functions. One of these is to store glucose and then release it into your bloodstream when your blood glucose level falls. Your liver is unable to release glucose into your bloodstream if you have consumed too much alcohol.

### Alcohol and Hypos

If your diabetes is treated with insulin or some types of tablets, drinking alcohol may cause your blood glucose levels to fall and you may experience a low blood glucose reaction (a hypo).

Check with your diabetes healthcare team if your diabetes treatment can increase the risk of a hypo. If this is relevant to you see NHS Lanarkshire leaflet "Having a Hypo" for more information.

## IF YOU ARE AT RISK OF HYPOS SOME PRECAUTIONS TO TAKE...

- ❖ Hypoglycaemia and the effects of alcohol can be confused with each other.
- ❖ Remember your judgment may be affected when you drink. You may not recognise that your blood glucose levels are low.
- ❖ Make sure that your friends and family know about hypos.
- ❖ Always wear or carry diabetes information (a bracelet, necklace or ID card.)
- ❖ Keep to sensible drinking levels. You could alternate an alcoholic drink with a diet/sugar free soft drink to reduce your alcohol intake.
- ❖ Don't drink on an empty stomach. Enjoy a meal before or with alcohol.
- ❖ Always carry some hypo treatment with you.

## ALCOHOL AND INSULIN

Check with your diabetes team about adjusting your insulin.

Remember hypos can happen some hours after a drinking session, even into the next morning. Check your blood glucose level and always have a snack before you go to sleep. Remember to check your blood glucose level in the morning too.

### OTHER INFORMATION ABOUT ALCOHOL

- ❖ Extra strength lagers contain much more alcohol than ordinary lagers.
- ❖ Low alcohol beers, lagers and ciders vary enormously in their alcohol content. They can be virtually alcohol free (0.05%) or contain 1/3 the amount of alcohol as similar drinks of ordinary strength. Low alcohol drinks also tend to be higher in sugar than ordinary strength drinks.

### Remember

- ❖ Keep your alcohol intake down if you want to lose or maintain your weight – alcohol is high in calories.
- ❖ Know your sensible drinking limits.
- ❖ Avoid drinks that are high in sugar (carbohydrate) such as alco-pops.
- ❖ Mixer drinks and soft drinks should be diet, sugar free or low calorie.
- ❖ Choose ordinary varieties of beer and lager.
- ❖ Low alcohol drinks may contain more alcohol than you think.
- ❖ Low **alcohol** drinks may have a higher **sugar and calorie** content.
- ❖ Low **sugar** beers or lagers tend to have higher **alcohol** content.
- ❖ Low sugar beers and lagers such as Diet Pils are higher in alcohol content and are not recommended, especially if you are on insulin.

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Pub. date:	November 2023
Review date:	November 2025
Issue No:	06
Clinical Lead:	



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