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well



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Alcohol and Diabetes

Drink Wise, Age Well aims to help people make healthier choices about alcohol as they age. For some people alcohol can have a positive impact on their lives as part of socialising and relaxation. Many of us will enjoy alcohol as we get older and not experience negative effects.

Although alcohol does have an effect on blood sugar levels, with a few precautions and careful management, people with diabetes can also enjoy a drink. So if I have diabetes I can drink as usual? Not quite. People with diabetes need to be extra careful with alcohol. Alcohol intake significantly increases the risk of hypoglycemia (low blood sugar levels). If your diabetes is already well under control, a moderate amount of alcohol may be fine either before, during or soon after a meal.

Is drinking alcohol with diabetes dangerous?

Drinking lots of alcohol is dangerous for anyone. However, with larger amounts of alcohol, serious hypoglycaemia can occur. Government guidance says to reduce risks to your health, you should drink no more than 14 units of alcohol a week and spread this evenly over three days or more.

Alcohol affects blood glucose levels and can cause spikes and drops. Some drinks like beers, ales, ciders for example contain carbohydrates and will increase your blood glucose levels in the short term. Spirits, dry wines, champagne - not so much.



How will alcohol affect my blood sugar control?

Different alcoholic drinks will have varying effects on your blood sugar. It also depends how much you drink. A single alcoholic drink (a 330ml bottle of beer, or medium glass of wine) may not have a huge effect on your overall blood sugar. If you have more than a single drink, most alcoholic drinks will tend to initially raise your blood sugar. Typically beers, lagers, wines, sherries and liqueurs will have this effect.

Alcohol inhibits the liver from turning proteins into glucose which means you're at a greater risk of hypoglycemia once your blood sugars start to come down. If you have a number of these drinks, you can expect to see a rise in blood sugar followed by a steady drop a number of hours later, often whilst asleep. People who take insulin, in particular, therefore need to be wary of hypoglycemia.

Each person will have a slightly different reaction to alcoholic drinks so it's well worth using blood tests to check how your body responds to it.

Will I have a hypo whilst drunk?

The symptoms of drunkenness can be very similar to a hypo, which can lead to very dangerous confusion. Furthermore, if you have been drinking heavily, there may be a risk of hypos for up to 16 hours (or even more) after you have stopped drinking. Monitoring blood glucose levels closely is an essential part of managing your diabetes in this situation.

Drinking heavily can increase the chances of you having a hypo, especially if you have been drinking on an empty stomach. A hypo is more likely to occur if you treat your diabetes with insulin or certain diabetes medications. The liver helps keep our blood glucose steady, but if your liver is busy getting rid of the alcohol it can't do this effectively, causing your blood glucose to drop and stay low until the alcohol is metabolised. This explains why you crave carbs and wake up the next day with a headache. The risk of a hypo increases shortly after drinking alcohol and can last up to 24 hours.

A hypo can often be mistaken for being drunk - so make sure you carry some hypo treatments, medical ID and that if you are with people that someone knows about your condition. If you have nerve damage as a result of diabetes, drinking alcohol can make it worse and increase the pain, tingling, numbness and other symptoms.

Source: www.diabetes.org.uk



As we get older, alcohol affects us differently and can start causing us problems. It can:

Interact negatively with medication



Increase blood pressure



Increase the risk of injury or falls



Make health problems worse i.e. Diabetes



14
UNITS
per
week

=



=

14
UNITS
per
week

If you do drink as much as 14 units per week, try to spread this evenly over 3 days or more

If you wish to cut down the amount you're drinking, a good way to help achieve this is to have several drink-free days each week

MAKE SIMPLE CHANGES

6 TIPS TO MAKE HEALTHIER CHOICES ABOUT ALCOHOL

1

LOWER YOUR RISK

Stay within the recommended guidelines of 14 units per week and spread these out over a few days.

2

KEEP TRACK

Our free unit measuring cup, unit guide and drinks diary can help you keep track of how much you're drinking.

3

KEEP ACTIVE

Getting older has its positives, such as time to do things we enjoy. We run lots of social activities and events which you'll find on our website

4

GIVE YOUR BODY A BREAK

Have at least 2-3 alcohol free days each week.

5

EAT SOMETHING

Have a meal when you are drinking or eat something beforehand.

6

KEEP HYDRATED

Have a non-alcoholic drink or water with or after each alcoholic drink. Sometimes we don't feel the effects right away and drink a little too quickly.



Drinking alcohol is a personal choice and there are some things you might want to consider:

Alcohol can affect your appearance, your body and your health:

It dehydrates the body and interferes with your normal sleep processes so you may wake up feeling - and looking - like you've had a bad night's sleep with red eyes, a headache and bad skin.

In the longer-term it can also lead to weight gain because it contains calories but no nutrition. It can also make you hungry which sometimes lead to poor decisions such as unplanned takeaway on the way home.

It can also lead to saggy skin and premature ageing and in some cases certain cancers and heart disease.

How can Drink Wise, Age Well help?

Drink Wise, Age Well works alongside communities delivering educational, awareness raising and community activities across our five areas. If you would like to speak to some one about your own or a loved one's drinking, we offer advice and support for people aged over 50, find your local service on our website.

Do you want to get out and meet new people, find new interests and share the things that are already important to you? We offer a range of events, courses and activities locally to interest you, such as exercise, cooking and arts classes, hobby workshops or courses to help you get the most out of life.

To find out about local events or to get involved in your area visit:
drinkwiseagewell.org.uk/