



Alcohol and Diabetes

If you have diabetes, it's important to understand how drinking alcohol can affect your blood sugar.

What's one alcoholic drink?

- One 12-ounce bottle of beer or wine cooler
- One 5-ounce glass of wine
- 1.5 ounces of liquor (like vodka, scotch, or gin) in a shot or a mixed drink (with tonic or juice)

Beer or Cooler



5% alcohol 12 oz.

Malt Liquor



7% alcohol 8.5 oz.

Table Wine



12% alcohol 5 oz.

80-Proof Spirits (gin, vodka, whiskey, etc.)



40% alcohol 1.5 oz.

The percent of "pure" alcohol, expressed here as alcohol by volume (alc/vol), varies by beverage.

When should I limit or stop drinking alcohol?

Limit or stop drinking if:

- Your diabetes isn't well controlled and your blood sugar is too high or too low.
- You have other health problems, such as nerve damage, eye disease, or problems with your stomach or pancreas.
- You have high blood triglycerides (a type of fat in the blood).
- You're pregnant or breastfeeding.
- You've had problems with alcohol in the past.

Will alcohol interfere with any of my medications?

Maybe. Your doctor may have prescribed several types of medications to help control your blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood sugar. Drinking alcohol may change the way diabetes and other medications work in the body.

Talk with your doctor, pharmacist, or diabetes educator about how to stay safe and avoid problems with alcohol and medication.

What should I know if I decide to drink alcohol?

- Limit how much you drink. Keep it to 1 drink per day for women; 2 drinks per day for men.
- Avoid sweet wines or mixed drinks with juices. These have extra calories and carbohydrates that raise your blood sugar. Use calorie-free and sugar-free club soda, tonic, or water instead.
- Always eat a meal or a snack first. Drinking alcohol on an empty stomach can cause low blood sugar (called hypoglycemia where blood sugar is less than 70 mg/dL).
- Be safe. Alcohol can affect your judgment and behavior. It can also cause blood sugar to get dangerously low. Friends and family could mistake symptoms of low blood sugar for signs that you've had too much to drink.
- Check your blood sugar often to learn your body's response to alcohol.
- Be careful with exercise. Alcohol and exercise both lower blood sugar. Don't drink if you've just exercised or plan to exercise.

Follow these other safety tips when drinking alcohol:

- Always wear medical identification if you take insulin or diabetes medications.
- Never drink and drive.
- Make sure your family and friends know the signs of low blood sugar and how to treat it.

How many calories and carbohydrates are there in alcoholic drinks?

Alcoholic drinks often have different amounts of carbohydrates and calories.

Drinking too much can make you gain weight and make your blood sugar harder to control. If you plan to drink alcohol, talk to your diabetes care team about how to fit it into a healthy lifestyle.

Drink	Amount (oz.)	Calories	Carbohydrate grams
regular beer	12	150	13
light beer	12	100	5
nonalcoholic beer	12	60	12
dry wine	4	80–90	0–5
nonalcoholic wine	4	25–35	6–7
champagne or sparkling wine	4	100	4
sweet dessert wine	2	100	7
wine cooler	12	215	30
gin, rum, vodka, brandy, scotch whiskey	1.5	100–115	0
liqueurs, cordials	1.5	160	17
martini	1.5	156	0
margarita	8	420	80
piña colada	5	290	44
bloody mary	5	115	5