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# Alcohol and Diabetes

Department of Nutrition and Dietetics



**Patient:** .....

**Date:** .....

**Dietitian:** .....

**Contact Details:** .....

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## Useful websites

<http://www.nhs.uk/change4life>

<https://www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts/Alcohol>

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## Further Information

We endeavor to provide an excellent service at all times, but should you have any concerns please, in the first instance, raise these with the Matron, Senior Nurse or Manager on duty.

If they cannot resolve your concern, please contact our Patient Experience Team on 01932 723553 or email [patient.advice@asph.nhs.uk](mailto:patient.advice@asph.nhs.uk). If you remain concerned, the team can also advise upon how to make a formal complaint.

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# Alcohol and Diabetes

## Can I drink alcohol?

As a general rule there is no need to give up alcohol just because you have diabetes; the same guidelines apply to everyone.

## What effect does alcohol have on my blood glucose?

Many alcoholic drinks contain some carbohydrate, usually in the form of sugar.

Alcohol will initially raise blood glucose levels but then they will drop. This can lead to hypoglycaemia. You may not recognise and respond to early signs of hypoglycaemia as it can be mistaken for drunkenness.

To minimise this risk it is important that you:

- Do not drink on an empty stomach
- Do not substitute alcohol for a meal
- Do have a snack shortly after / during drinking e.g. toast, sandwich, cereal or a packet of crisps

Hypoglycaemia may develop several hours after drinking alcohol so you may need an extra snack at bedtime containing carbohydrate.

Remember, if in doubt check blood glucose levels.

## General Guidelines

- Never drink and drive.
- It is always best to drink with meals and not on an empty stomach.
- Do not substitute alcoholic drinks for your usual meals or snacks. Do not count the carbohydrate from alcohol when carbohydrate counting.
- Sweet drinks such as sweet Sherries, sweet wines, alcopops and most liqueurs should be avoided.
- Mixer drinks such as tonic water and cordials should be diet, sugar free or low calorie products.
- If you are drinking beers or lagers, choose the ordinary varieties. The low sugar versions are higher in alcohol and some low alcohol ones can be high in sugar.
- Always wear some form of diabetes identification e.g. your Diabetes UK ID card, as a hypo may be confused with drunkenness particularly if you have alcohol on your breath.

## How much can I drink?

How, what and when you drink will be influenced by your health and lifestyle. The recommended safe levels of alcohol intake for men and women are:

- No more than 2 units / day with a maximum of 14 units a week.
- Everybody should have two or three alcohol free days a week.
- There is no safe level of alcohol to drink during pregnancy.

Be aware that home measures of alcohol may be larger than a pub measure.

If you are watching your weight then limiting your alcohol intake is sensible as it is high in calories.

## What can I drink?

- **Lager and Beer** (1 pint of normal strength = 2 units)  
Choose the normal strength beer or lager. The low sugar ones are higher in alcohol and some low alcohol ones can be high in sugar.
- **Wines** (175mls glass of wine = 2 units)  
Choose either dry or medium versions of wine or sherry
- **Soft Drinks**  
Choose diet or low calorie drinks. Do not drink too much fruit juice as this may cause your blood glucose levels to rise. If you are out for the evening, it may be wise to alternate alcoholic drinks with non-alcoholic drinks.

## Diabetic Tablets and Alcohol

If you are taking tablets to control your diabetes, alcohol may cause flushing of the face.