



**Wolverhampton
Diabetes Care**

Alcohol and Diabetes

All the rules about alcohol that apply to everyone apply to people with diabetes. Having diabetes does not affect the general advice given on consumption of alcohol unless there are special circumstances. A small amount of alcohol will do no harm and can be enjoyed.

How do I count alcohol?

Alcohol is measured in units. One unit is equivalent to 10ml (1cl) of pure alcohol. The rule is no more than 3 units a day for men and no more than 2 units per day for women. One measure of spirit, 1 standard glass of wine or 1/2 a pint of beer is a unit.

What can I drink?

If and when you drink, avoid low sugar beers as these tend to be higher in alcohol content and low alcohol beers which are high in sugar. Stick to ordinary beers, and avoid drinks high in sugar (sweet wine, sherry, liqueurs). Know your drinks and check the percentage alcohol content. If you are having mixers in your drink, use mixed or soft drinks that are diet, low calorie or sugar free.

How does alcohol affect my diabetes?

Alcohol contains a lot of calories so heavy drinking may cause weight problems. It can affect your blood pressure, liver and kidney function and blood fats. It may react with various medications you are on. Alcohol can lead to poor control causing both high and low blood sugar levels.

What about alcohol and hypos?

Judgement is affected by alcohol which may make it difficult for you to recognise that your blood glucose levels are low. Too much alcohol may cause a hypo, particularly if you take insulin or certain tablets to treat your diabetes. It does this by affecting the way your liver works. It is a particular problem if you forget to eat when you drink alcohol. Hypos can occur some time after you have had a drinking session and this is most troublesome at night time and in the early hours of the morning. Check your blood glucose levels before you go to sleep and have a snack. Remember to check your blood glucose level the following morning too.

How can I help myself?

Don't drink on an empty stomach, especially if you are taking insulin or tablet medication. Eat little and often while you are drinking. Always carry glucose tablets or sweets to correct hypos. Carry your diabetes identification card as a hypo may be confused as drunkenness. Never drink and drive. Be open and honest about how much you are drinking when you meet with your medical team. Seek advice about safe drinking which may differ between people.

Seeking help and what care to expect

Your medical team should advise you on what is safe drinking for you. If you feel you have a drink problem, they will direct you to special help if needed.