

## Alcohol and Diabetes

Once you drink alcohol, your liver works to break it down and will turn off its usual production of glucose. You can be at an increased risk for hypoglycemia when you drink alcohol.

### Factors to consider before drinking alcohol:

- **Medications:** Certain diabetes medications and insulin can put you at risk for a low blood sugar. Check with your health care provider to see if it's okay to combine alcohol with ANY of your meds.
- **Never drink alcohol on an empty stomach.** Plan to have your drink with a meal or after eating a snack.
- **Drink in moderation.** Limit yourself to 1 drink per day if you are a woman or 2 drinks per day if you are a man.
- **Be careful with exercise.** Both alcohol and exercise lower blood sugar. It's best to avoid alcohol after vigorous exercise.
- **Be safe.** If you have low blood sugar, you may need to treat it more than once as time goes by.
- **Check blood sugars before you go to bed.** Check to verify that your sugars are between 100 and 140 mg/dL before you go to sleep – if not, eat a snack with carbohydrates and protein and check again before you go to sleep and again over night to be sure it is not dropping too low while you sleep.

### Alcohol Facts

- 5 minutes – time it takes for alcohol to reach the blood stream.
- 30-90 minutes – after a drink, the point where alcohol is at the highest level in the blood stream.
- 2 hours – how long it take a 150 lb. person to metabolize an alcoholic drink.
- Brain cells will be exposed to alcohol if the liver cannot keep up with detoxification.

**Note: Low blood sugar when drinking is less of a risk for those with type 2 diabetes controlled with meal planning and exercise only.**

### Avoid alcohol if you have:

- **Nerve damage** from diabetes in your arms or legs. Alcohol is toxic to nerves and can increase the pain, burning, tingling, numbness.
- **Diabetic eye disease**
- **High blood pressure**
- **Gastritis or GERD**
- **High triglycerides.** Alcohol can cause the liver to make more triglycerides. Even light drinking (two 4 oz. glasses of wine a week) can raise triglyceride levels.
- **Pancreatitis**
- **History of alcohol abuse**

## Dangers of heavy drinking:

- Heavy drinking over time can hurt your liver and change the way it produces glucose, making your blood glucose levels more difficult to control.
- Feelings of intoxication and hypoglycemia can be the same – feeling sleepy, dizzy, or confused. Therefore someone may not think to treat hypoglycemia.

**A warning for those on insulin:** Glucagon injections don't help severe low blood glucose caused by drinking.

- Glucagon injections treat very severe low blood glucose reactions caused by too much insulin. Glucagon gets your liver to release more glucose into your blood, but alcohol will stop this process.
- Treat low blood sugar reactions with carbohydrates, such as 4 glucose tablets or 4 ounces of juice.
- Avoid letting a low blood glucose level become severe. If you pass out, you may need a glucagon injection and a trip to the emergency room.

## Suggestions for when you do drink:

- Light beers and dry wines can be good choices.
- Choose mixers that are sugar free such as diet soft drinks, diet tonic, club soda, seltzer, diet juice, or water.
- To make drinks last longer, try a "spritzer." Mix wine with sparkling water, club soda, or diet soda.
- For a non-alcoholic alternative, you could try mixing juice with club soda and a lime wedge, or try a "virgin" Bloody Mary made without alcohol.

| Drink                                    | Amount              | Calories | Carbohydrate Grams |
|--|---------------------|----------|--------------------|
| Regular beer                             | 12 oz               | 140      | 10 gms             |
| Lite beer                                | 12 oz               | 110      | 12 gms             |
| Non-alcoholic beer                       | 12 oz               | 70       | 14 gms             |
| Dry wine                                 | 4 oz                | 80-90    | 4 gms              |
| Non-alcoholic wine                       | 4 oz                | 25-35    | 5-8 gms            |
| Champagne                                | 4 oz                | 85       | 2 gms              |
| Sweet dessert wine                       | 2 oz                | 85       | 2 gms              |
| Wine cooler                              | 12 oz               | 225      | 30 gms             |
| Gin, Vodka, Scotch, Whiskey, Brandy, Rum | 1.5 oz (1 shot)     | 100-125  | 0 gms              |
| Liqueurs, Cordials                       | 1.5 oz (1 shot)     | 120      | 13 gms             |
| Pina Colada                              | 6 oz                | 250      | 18 gms             |
| Bloody Mary                              | With 1.5 oz alcohol | 125      | 7 gms              |

**\*Do not count carbohydrates in alcohol as part of your total meal carbohydrate allowance, but keep in mind that alcohol is a source of many empty calories.**