

Staying Healthy with Diabetes

Rules to Avoid Alcohol Complications

“Alcohol is both a tonic and a poison,” say experts at the *Harvard School of Public Health*. It’s the dose that makes the difference.

A “moderate” intake of alcohol, for example, may benefit the heart and blood pressure. Excess alcohol has the opposite effect; it can damage the heart and liver and increases blood pressure. That’s why drinking alcohol safely when you have diabetes can be tricky. Here are some basic rules to help you prevent potential complications:

Rule 1: Check with your doctor first.

Some medications do not mix well with alcohol, including those prescribed for blood pressure and glucose control. Alcohol may also worsen symptoms of neuropathy (nerve damage) and retinopathy (eye damage).

Rule 2: Make sure your blood sugar is in good control. Alcohol can further complicate the dangers of extreme high and low blood glucose values.

Rule 3. Always have food when you drink alcohol. Drinking on an empty stomach puts you at risk for dangerously low blood sugar (hypoglycemia).

Rule 4. Do not exceed a “moderate” intake of alcohol. Moderate drinking for women is no more than 1 alcoholic beverage a day. For men, it’s no more than 2 drinks a day. One drink is equal to 4 to 5 ounces (a little over ½ cup) of wine *or* 12 ounces beer *or* approximately 1 ounce (a “shot”) of hard liquor.

Rule 5. Wear an identification bracelet to inform others that you have diabetes.

Alcohol in combination with some diabetes medications can cause low blood sugar symptoms that mimic alcohol intoxication. It is critical that you get the correct treatment if you are experiencing symptoms of low blood sugar (hypoglycemia).

Rule 6. Do *not* drink at all if you are pregnant, have alcoholism, or have liver disease. Even small amounts of alcohol are risky with these conditions.

Rule 7. Do not drive for several hours after you drink alcohol. Safe is always better than sorry.

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