DIABETES CANADA

Alcohol and diabetes

As a general rule, there is no need to avoid alcohol because you have diabetes.

You *should not* drink alcohol if you:

- are pregnant or trying to get pregnant
- are breastfeeding
- have a personal or family history of drinking problems
- are planning to drive or engage in other activities that require attention or skill
- are taking certain medications. Ask your pharmacist about your medications.

Consider the following questions when deciding what is best for you.

		Yes	No
1	Is my diabetes under control?	☐	☐
2	Am I free from health problems that alcohol can make worse such as disease of the pancreas, eye disease, high blood pressure, high triglycerides, liver problems, nerve damage or stroke?	☐	☐
3	Do I know how to prevent and treat low blood sugar?	☐	☐

If you answered "no" to any of these questions, you should speak to your diabetes educator or health-care professional before drinking alcohol.

If you answered "yes" to all of these questions, it is OK to drink alcohol in moderation.

Moderate alcohol intake is limited to 2 standard drinks/ day or less than 10 drinks/ week for women; and limited to 3 standard drinks/ day or less than 15 drinks/ week for men.

This recommendation is the same for people without diabetes. For people with high blood pressure, alcohol should be limited to 1 drink/day for women and 2 drinks/day for men.

What is a "standard drink"?

1 standard drink (10 g of alcohol):

Beer
341 mL (12 fl.oz)
of regular strength beer
(5% alcohol)

Spirits
43 mL (1.5 fl.oz) of spirits
(40% alcohol)

Wine
142 mL (5 fl.oz) of wine
(12% alcohol)

Note: If you are carbohydrate counting, do not take insulin for the carbohydrate content of alcoholic drinks.

Health risks of alcohol use

You may have heard that alcohol has certain health benefits. However, any pattern of drinking can be harmful. Proven ways of improving your health include: healthy eating, being active, and being a non-smoker.

The Diabetes Canada Clinical Practice Guidelines recommend that:

- People with type 1 diabetes should be aware that moderate consumption of alcohol with, or 2 to 3 hours after, an evening meal may result in delayed low blood sugar (hypoglycemia) the next morning after breakfast, or up to 24 hours after alcohol consumption. This also applies to people with type 2 diabetes who are using insulin or insulin secretagogues.
- Alcohol should be limited to 2 standard drinks/ day or less than 10 drinks/ week for women, and limited to 3 standard drinks/ day or less than 15 drinks/ week for men.
- People with diabetes should discuss alcohol use with their diabetes health-care team.

Risks for people with diabetes

Alcohol can:

- affect judgement
- provide empty calories that might lead to weight gain if taken in excess
- increase blood pressure and triglycerides
- cause damage to liver and nerves including brain and sexual organs
- contribute to inflammation of the pancreas
- dehydrate the body which is very dangerous in someone with high blood sugar
- worsen eye disease

For young people in particular, alcohol use:

- can lead to addiction
- is associated with a dramatic increase in injuries and death