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IMPORTANT FACTS ABOUT ALCOHOL

In the United States, the legal age for purchasing and drinking alcohol is 21 years of age.

Alcohol is high in calories and low in nutrients. Drinking alcohol can lead to weight gain and an increase in blood fat levels.

Drinking alcohol can cause low blood sugar in people taking insulin or insulin stimulating pills.

When you drink alcohol, your liver makes breaking down alcohol its number one priority because alcohol is toxic to your body. Since your liver is busy breaking down alcohol, it is not able to focus on managing your blood sugar level and releasing glucose (sugars) when your body needs it. This can put you at risk for very low blood sugars when drinking alcohol.

Cottage Health does not support the use of alcohol or underage drinking.



Alcohol's Effect on Blood Sugars

- The more alcohol you drink, the greater your risk of having low blood sugar.
- If you are active while drinking, like walking or dancing, this also increases the risk of low blood sugars.
- When you are drinking emergency use of Glucagon may not work because your liver is focused on breaking down alcohol.
- The breakdown of alcohol slows the digestion of your food. This can cause your post-meal or snack blood sugar response to be delayed.
- Alcoholic drinks that are made with soda, juice, syrup, or added sugar can cause higher blood sugars.



Safety with Diabetes and Alcohol

- Know the signs of low and high blood sugar.
- Tell your friends and family about the signs of high and low blood sugar levels. Let them know how they can help you in a case of low blood sugar, including **calling 9-1-1**, if you are unconscious or confused.
- **Always** wear your medical ID.
- Do not drink alcohol on an empty stomach. Do not skip meals while drinking. If drinking, always have a meal and snacks that contain carbohydrates.
- **Always** carry fast-acting carbohydrates with you, like glucose tablets, in case of low blood sugar. Also, bring extra snacks containing carbohydrates.
- **Check** your blood sugar more often and/or turn on the alarms on your continuous glucose monitor. The effects of alcohol can make it hard to notice the symptoms of low blood sugar.
- Bring extra supplies including insulin, needles, glucose monitor, etc.
- Talk with your doctor about how to handle your insulin to improve your blood sugar control and safety with alcohol.

REFERENCES

dtc.ucsf.edu/living-with-diabetes/diet-and-nutrition/diabetes-alcohol

jdrf.org/t1d-resources/living-with-t1d/food-and-diet/diabetes-and-alcohol

Pediatric Diabetes: Alcohol and type 1 Diabetes advice for adolescents: University Hospitals Coventry & Warwickshire