



# Does alcohol affect blood sugar levels in diabetes?



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For many people, the occasional glass of alcohol does not pose a problem. However, for people with diabetes, alcohol consumption can affect blood sugar levels.

Understanding what one is consuming and how alcohol influences blood sugar levels is particularly important for people with [diabetes](#).

## ✓ **Fast facts on alcohol and diabetes**

- Alcohol can interfere with blood sugar levels.
- Excessive alcohol consumption can reduce the effectiveness of [insulin](#).
- People with diabetes should try to sip drinks slowly and not drink on an empty stomach.

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## Effects of alcohol



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Alcohol is a depressant. It is classed as a sedative-hypnotic drug because it depresses the [central nervous system](#).

Alcohol can affect every organ in the human body. Once a person consumes it, it is rapidly absorbed by the stomach and small intestine and enters the bloodstream.

In an average person, the liver breaks down roughly one standard alcoholic drink per hour. Excess alcohol moves throughout the body. Any alcohol that the liver does not break down is removed by the lungs, kidneys, and skin through urine and sweat.

How alcohol affects a person's body depends on how much of it they consume. In low amounts, alcohol can act as a stimulant. For example, a person may feel happier or become more talkative.

However, drinking too much alcohol can impair the body. This is

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## Blood sugar levels

A person's overall health plays a significant role in how their body responds to alcohol. People with diabetes or other blood sugar issues must be careful when consuming alcohol.

Alcohol consumption can interfere with blood sugar as well as the hormones needed to maintain healthy blood sugar levels. People who frequently consume a lot of alcohol can wipe out their energy storage in a few hours.

Over time, excessive alcohol consumption can reduce the overall effectiveness of insulin. This results in [high blood sugar levels](#). Many people with [alcoholic liver disease](#) also have either glucose intolerance or diabetes.

Normal fasting blood sugar levels should be in the range of 70–100 milligrams per deciliter (mg/dl). People who have untreated diabetes generally have blood sugar levels higher than 126 mg/dl.

People with diabetes have to be very careful when it comes to drinking alcohol. It is a good idea for them to talk with a doctor so that they thoroughly understand the risks involved.

Some medications are not suitable for use alongside alcohol consumption. People with diabetes should be sure to pay attention to any potential warnings.

Alcohol consumption can lead to dangerously low blood sugar levels. This is because the liver has to work to remove the alcohol from the blood instead of managing blood sugar levels. Alcohol consumption can also lead to situational unawareness of low blood sugar levels.

Some of the symptoms of low blood sugar levels are similar to those of consuming too much alcohol. These include:

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- [headaches](#)
- lightheadedness or dizziness
- lack of coordination
- unconsciousness

## Other problems related to alcohol and diabetes

Alcohol's effect on blood sugar levels is not the only way that it can affect someone with diabetes. Alcohol consumption can also:

- stimulate one's appetite, encouraging overeating and increasing blood sugar levels further
- make it difficult to lose weight due to the [calories](#) it contains
- reduce willpower and increase the chance of making unhealthy dietary choices
- interfere with the effectiveness of some oral diabetes medications
- increase [blood pressure](#)

## Alcohol consumption guidelines

People with diabetes who plan on drinking alcohol should check their blood sugar levels before and up to 24 hours after drinking. They should also check these levels at bedtime to ensure that they are stable before sleeping.

According to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#)<sup>®</sup>, one standard drink in the United States is equal to 14 grams (g) (0.6 ounces [oz]) of pure alcohol.

Beverages such as beer and wine can have an alcohol content of 2–20%. Spirits can contain 40–50% or even more alcohol.

Below is the alcohol content in some common alcoholic drinks, according to the CDC. Each is equal to one drink.

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- 8 oz of malt liquor contains 7% alcohol content.
- 5 oz of wine contains 12% alcohol content.
- 1.5 oz, or a “shot,” of an 80-proof spirit contains 40% alcohol content.

It is also important to mention that due to the growing popularity of craft beers, the alcohol content of some beers is now higher than 5%. It typically varies by beer type.

## Tips

People with blood sugar issues should avoid consuming mixed drinks and cocktails. These drinks are often full of sugar and empty calories and may increase blood sugar levels.

The [American Diabetes Association](#) recommends the following tips for people with diabetes when they drink alcohol:

- Women should not consume more than one drink per day.
- Men should not consume more than two drinks per day.
- Do not drink on an empty stomach or when blood sugar levels are low.
- Do not replace food with alcohol in a meal plan, and do not count alcohol in a food plan as a [carbohydrate](#) choice.
- Sip drinks slowly to make them last.
- Keep hydrated with zero-calorie beverages, such as water or diet soda.
- Try a light beer or wine spritzer.
- Be wary of heavy craft beers, as these can contain twice as much alcohol and twice as many calories as lighter beers.
- Choose calorie-free drink mixers, such as diet soda or diet tonic water.

information from the [Department of Agriculture](#). They show the amount of carbs and sugar in different alcoholic beverages.

## Beer

Type	Serving	Carbs (g)	Sugars (g)
Light beer	1 can or bottle (354 g)	5.81	0.3
Regular beer	1 can (356 g)	12.6	0
Strong beer	1 bottle (355 g)	0.96	0

## Wine

Type	Serving	Carbs (g)	Sugars (g)
Red wine	5 fl oz	3.84	0.91
White wine	5 fl oz	3.82	1.41

## Spirits

Type	Serving	Carbs (g)	Sugars (g)
Whiskey	1.5 fl oz	0.04	0.04
Vodka	1.5 fl oz	0	0
Gin	1.5 fl oz	0	0
Rum	1.5 fl oz	0	0

## Cocktails

Type	Serving	Carbs (g)	Sugars (g)
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Whiskey sour	3.5 fl oz	13.59	13.55
Tequila sunrise	6.8 fl oz	23.84	N/A

## Summary

Most people with diabetes can enjoy an occasional alcoholic drink. Each alcoholic beverage takes between 1 and 1.5 hours to finish processing in the liver. The more alcohol a person consumes, the higher their risk of experiencing low blood sugar levels.

Low blood sugar symptoms can suddenly appear, and they can be dangerous if a person is not prepared. It is a good idea to eat carbs before drinking alcohol to help keep blood sugar levels steady.

People with diabetes can carry glucose tabs in case of an emergency, and they should check their blood sugar levels regularly. They should also remember that some diabetes medications may not work if they consume too much alcohol.

[One study](#) found that women who drink moderately have a lower risk of developing [type 2 diabetes](#) than women who do not drink. The study had a number of limitations, however, which might alter the perception of impact.

That said, when it comes to alcohol, people with blood sugar problems should always remain cautious. It is best to follow daily recommended consumption limits.

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