CARBS IN ALCOHOL

If you have Type 1 diabetes and drink alcohol it is important to understand the effects of alcohol on blood glucose levels. The effects can vary considerably between individuals and there is a much higher risk of hypos when you have been drinking alcohol.

This guide gives an overview of the effects of alcohol on blood glucose. It is important to seek individual advice from your diabetes care team.

Alcoholic drinks contain alcohol and may also contain carbohydrate, either from the drink or from any mixer that has been added. Some alcoholic drinks contain no carbohydrate.

How does alcohol affect blood glucose?

Alcohol is a toxin that is removed from the blood by the liver. The liver also stops the level of glucose in the blood dropping too low, by releasing more glucose. In the presence of alcohol, the liver does not release glucose into the blood so readily, meaning there is an increased risk of hypos with alcohol. This is often called ‘delayed hypoglycaemia’ because it can occur many hours after drinking, often in the middle of the night or early the next morning, if you’ve been drinking in the evening.

Delayed Hypoglycaemia is unlikely with one or two drinks but higher alcohol content and consuming more drinks will increase the risk of delayed hypoglycaemia.

KEY POINTS

- Be sure to eat first
- Don’t drink alcohol on an empty stomach.
- Take advice
- Be cautious if injecting insulin for carbohydrate in alcoholic drinks, and get advice from your diabetes care team.
- Before bed...
- Check blood glucose and eat carbs before bed if you have been drinking in the evening.
ALCOHOLIC DRINKS WITHOUT CARBOHYDRATE

The drinks below are examples of alcoholic drinks that do not contain carbohydrate. Therefore they do not cause blood glucose to increase but there is a risk of delayed hypoglycaemia. This risk is increased with higher alcohol content.

- **Red Wine**: 3 Units, 1g Carbs, 250ml, large, 190 Cals
- **Champagne**: 1½ Units, 2g Carbs, 125ml, 95 Cals
- **White Wine (dry)**: 1½ Units, 1g Carbs, 125ml, small, 94 Cals
- **Gin**: 1 Unit, 0g Carbs, 25ml, 56 Cals
- **Whisky**: 1 Unit, 0g Carbs, 25ml, 56 Cals
- **Vodka**: 1 Unit, 0g Carbs, 25ml, 56 Cals
ALCOHOLIC DRINKS WITH CARBOHYDRATE

These drinks contain alcohol and carbohydrate, which means they will cause an initial rise in blood glucose and there is a risk of delayed hypoglycaemia. One or two drinks will probably require no action, but more than this may need additional units of insulin and additional carbohydrate later. Your diabetes care team can advise you on this in greater detail.

**Ale (4% ABV)**
- 17g carbohydrate
- 568ml, pint
- 2 units
- 170 Cals

**Lager (4% ABV)**
- 12g carbohydrate
- 568ml, pint
- 2 units
- 208 Cals

**Stout (4% ABV)**
- 18g carbohydrate
- 568ml, pint
- 2 units
- 210 Cals

**Cider (sweet, 5% ABV)**
- 24g carbohydrate
- 568ml, pint
- 3 units
- 239 Cals

**WKD Vodka Blue**
- 36g carbohydrate
- 275ml, bottle
- 1 unit
- 216 Cals

**Irish Cream**
- 11g carbohydrate
- 50ml
- 1 unit
- 153 Cals