

Alcohol

Type 1 diabetes shouldn't prevent you from doing the things you enjoy, but if you decide to drink, being aware of how alcohol will affect your type 1 is key to enjoying it safely. When you are heading off for a night out remember to take your blood glucose meter, strips and insulin with you. Always carry some glucose tablets or sweets to treat a hypo.

Quick tip – if you haven't drunk much alcohol in the past and are concerned about the effect it could have on your type 1 diabetes, then start slowly! Choose a drink, see how you go and keep an eye on your blood glucose to see how your body responds. In general, people will not be watching how much you drink, no one will care if you're on your first drink and they're on the fifth as long as you look like you're having a good time (which no doubt you will be).

Important information

Alcohol and carbohydrate content

- Alcohol with little or no carbohydrate (e.g. wine, vodka, gin) doesn't cause a rise in blood glucose
- Alcohol containing carbohydrate (e.g. beer, cider, alcopops) causes blood glucose to rise and might require insulin to be taken alongside it. Get advice from your diabetes team

Alcohol and delayed hypoglycaemia

- All types of alcohol, especially in large amounts, increase the risk of delayed hypoglycaemia
- You may need to take action to prevent delayed hypoglycaemia. This may include reducing your background or basal insulin and/or eating extra carbohydrate
- You should discuss ways of preventing delayed hypoglycaemia after drinking alcohol with your healthcare team

Tips for drinking alcohol safely

Before you go out

- Have a good dinner. Eat a meal containing long-acting carbs. This can help to avoid hypos later on
- Be organised and sort out the things you need to take with you (testing kit, test strips, glucose tablets, diabetes ID) before you start drinking to make sure you don't forget anything. Think about saving some money to get a bus or taxi home
- Set your alarm for the next morning so you don't miss your morning insulin (if applicable). You can always go back to sleep afterwards

Whilst you're out

- Test regularly. After a few drinks you might be less aware of your hypo symptoms. It can be easy to have a hypo when you're out, particularly if you've been dancing or more active than usual. Your blood glucose may also run high due to what you're drinking
- Choose your drink wisely as certain drinks have lots of sugar in them. In general, avoid alcopops and be careful what you mix your drink with. Full sugar drinks (e.g. coke and energy drinks) will raise your blood glucose, whereas diet drinks will have no effect on it
- Try to find a good balance between how much sugar you are drinking and how much dancing you are doing to counteract it. Cocktails and shots (especially jaeger bombs) are often full of sugar too
- Tell your friends about your diabetes and what to do if they see you having a hypo. Remember, being drunk and having a hypo may appear very similar to other people. You may want to give them the [information sheet for flatmates](#) which has a space for your hypo symptoms
- Pace yourself – have regular soft drinks and water as well as snacks

When you get home

- Test and eat. You might grab a takeaway or have something to eat when you get back from a night out. This has lots of advantages: it's a reminder to test your blood glucose levels (and an alert if you're running high), will hopefully help avoid hypos in the night, and most importantly may help with the hangover the next day

The morning after

- It may help to keep your type 1 supplies near your bed, in case you're not feeling fit enough to grab them from further afield
- The risk of a hypo continues well into the next morning, so don't miss breakfast the next day and keep snacks at hand
- If you're hungover and don't feel like eating you might want to consider your normal or a slightly reduced dose of your intermediate or long-acting insulin and go back to bed. Consider getting advice or following your sick day plan
- If you're vomiting from overindulging, you should treat this like any other occasion of vomiting and keep a close watch on your blood glucose levels and ketones. Make sure you put your usual sick plan into action. You should set your clock to wake you again in two hours so that you can check that your blood glucose level is not too low

For more information on alcohol and type 1 diabetes, visit jdrf.org.uk/drinking.