



Alcohol, smoking and your diabetes

MAGNACARESM

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Understanding alcohol and tobacco use

If you're a person with diabetes who drinks and/or smokes, it's important to understand the effect alcohol and tobacco can have on your disease. The good news is that moderate drinking can be okay if your blood sugar is well-controlled. But smoking, while not a great idea for anyone, is never okay for someone who has diabetes, since it can increase damage to nerves, blood vessels and kidneys, aside from all the usual harm it can inflict on lungs and hearts.

Diabetes and alcohol

According to the American Diabetes Association (ADA), people with diabetes drink about half as much as other adults, presumably because they're aware that drinking can precipitate a number of health issues when you have diabetes. A few of the risks:

An increased risk of hypoglycemia, which may occur after drinking because your liver, which stores glucose after meals and releases it into your bloodstream, will metabolize alcohol over maintaining your blood glucose levels. And if you slip into a hypoglycemic state, it may not be as noticeable to others if you have been drinking, because the symptoms of low blood sugar mimic some aspects of being drunk (slurring your speech, confusion, drowsiness).

You can also become hyperglycemic, because a number of alcoholic drinks (beer, sweeter wine or liquor mixed with fruit juice) introduce carbs into your blood stream, which translate to more glucose. As with hypoglycemia, symptoms of high blood sugar (frequent urination, increased thirst, blurry vision) can be missed by you and other people, who may attribute them to your alcohol intake.

Drinking safely

If you'd like to be able to have that evening beer or cocktail, or the glass of wine over dinner, the very first thing you need to do is consult your medical team. If your doctor gives you the okay, it's best to follow the advice of the American Diabetes Association: One drink a day for women, up to two for men. But remember, the size of the drink matters. One drink is five ounces of wine, a 12 ounce beer or one and a half ounces of 80 proof spirits.

If You Choose to Drink: Tips for Staying Safe

- Never drink on an empty stomach
- Check your blood sugar before drinking
- Choose drinks lower in alcohol, calories and carbs (dry wines, light beer)
- Wear a medical ID bracelet that says you have diabetes
- Especially, don't drink and drive

Diabetes and smoking

In the mid-1960's, almost 43% of all adults in America used tobacco, mainly by smoking cigarettes. Today, only 9.9% of Americans smoke, although other forms of tobacco usage, including vaping, chewing tobacco and nicotine pouches, actually raise that rate to 18%. Still, a major public health success that has probably saved millions of lives and dollars.

If you smoke, a large body of smoking cessation methods developed over the past 60 years exists to help you quit. Because if you have diabetes, quitting smoking is one of the most important things you can do for your health.

The effect of smoking on you and your diabetes

Managing diabetes is tough. Smoking can make it even tougher. In general, just about every possible complication of diabetes is made worse when you smoke:

1. High levels of nicotine can make the cells in your body less responsive to insulin, which in turn can raise your blood sugar. Smoking is also associated with a higher risk of diabetic retinopathy, a serious disease of the eyes.
2. If you have diabetes and you smoke, your risk of having a stroke or heart attack are higher than if you were a nonsmoking person with diabetes, because smoking raises blood pressure and increases the risk of atherosclerosis.
3. People with diabetes are already prone to peripheral neuropathy, which can cause sharpen pain, numbness or tingling in your hands or feet. Smoking's adverse effect on circulation just makes that more likely.
4. Finally, if you smoke, you are less likely to maintain the levels of fitness needed to keep your body and your diabetes in good condition—at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity aerobic exercise a week.

Sources: | <https://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/risk-factors/diabetes-and-smoking.html> | <https://www.ummhealth.org/health-library/smoking-and-diabetes> | <https://truthinitiative.org/research-resources/harmful-effects-tobacco-smoking-and-diabetes-connection-between-2-us-epidemics> | https://www.cnr.msu.edu/news/smoking_increases_health_risks_for_people_with_diabetes | <https://diabetes.org/health-wellness/alcohol-and-diabetes> | <https://www.unionhealth/blogs/alcohol-and-diabetes-a-risky-cocktail-for-your-heart> | <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/-/media/general-internal-medicine/documents/faculty-resource/mixing-alcohol-with-your-diabetes.pdf> | <https://www.ummhealth.org/health-library/diabetes-and-drinking-alcohol>

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Quitting

The rewards of quitting smoking are immense. Your lungs will thank you, as will your heart and circulatory system. Insulin resistance should diminish, which means you will have better blood sugar control (although directly after quitting you should monitor blood sugar levels more frequently, until they stabilize). And with the average price of a pack of cigarettes being what it is (over ten dollars in New York), your wallet will thank you as well.

Here are a few different ways to start your journey to becoming a non-smoker.



Go cold turkey.

This can be tough, but many people do it. Best ways? Pick a date or period when your stress levels will be lower, if possible. Tell your doctor about it. Some people tell friends and family, while others think this just adds pressure. It's up to you.



If you need help, there is a lot out there.

Nicotine replacement products such as patches, gum and lozenges can really increase your chances of success. The Centers For Disease Control (CDC) has a very good page entitled [Tips From Former Smokers](#), which has toll-free numbers you can call for confidential smoking cessation advice, online services to help you quit in your state, and video advice from former smokers showing how they became cigarette-free.