Who is the leaflet for? What is its aim?

This information leaflet is for young people who have diabetes. Alcohol is the most popular drug used by society. It affects young people more than adults because their bodies are smaller. This leaflet aims to make drinking alcohol a safer experience for all young people with diabetes.

Why can drinking alcohol when you have diabetes a problem?

High Blood glucose

Alcohol is often found in drinks with high sugar content. Light beers and low calorie lagers do have a lower carbohydrate content but actually contain more alcohol. Increased carbohydrate intake due to alcoholic drinks can cause high blood glucose readings whilst you are drinking. You will need to be cautious about giving correction doses when you have a high blood glucose reading.

Hypoglycaemia

Alcohol makes the blood glucose rise quickly and fall quickly. It can be difficult for other people to recognise whether symptoms in a young person with diabetes such as slurred speech, acting out of character or sleepiness are due to hypoglycaemia or being “drunk”. Hypoglycaemia is also more difficult for individuals to recognise if they are under the influence of alcohol.

One of the effects of alcohol on the body is to decrease the normal background glucose production by the liver (gluconeogenesis). In non diabetics the pancreas can respond to lower background carbohydrate by switching off insulin production. However, in a diabetic there is a risk of hypoglycaemia occurring several hours after drinking alcohol as there are no mechanism to decrease their insulin after it has been given.

Tips for safe drinking with diabetes

• Always wear a medic alert bracelet so that members of the public/emergency services are alerted to the fact that you are diabetic in case you are unable to tell them yourself.
• Consider putting an ICE (In Case of Emergency) number in your mobile phone address book, emergency services look for this number and will call the person you select as your ICE number eg a parent.
• Take your blood glucose meter everywhere with you – in your handbag or pocket. Make sure you have rapid acting carbohydrates such as jelly beans or glucose tablets to treat a hypo together with slowly absorbed carbohydrates such as biscuits or a cereal bar to maintain your blood glucose levels after your hypo.

• Always make sure that at least one person with you is aware that you have diabetes and will help you check your blood glucose if you display symptoms of hypoglycaemia.

• Do not drink on an empty stomach as alcohol is absorbed more quickly and its effects will be greater. Eat a meal which contains carbohydrates such as potatoes, pasta, bread or rice before you go out.

• Checking the units in alcoholic drinks can be a good way of keeping track of how much you are drinking.

• Examples of alcohol units
  o a standard pub measure of vodka 25ml = 1 unit
  o small glass of wine 125ml= 1.5 units
  o pint of low strength beer = 2 units
  o pint of high strength beer = 3 units

• Be aware when drinking at home most people tend to pour larger amounts.
  o Recommendations for Adults:
  • Women and Men are advised to have ONLY 14 units of alcohol a week and this should ideally be spread over 3 days or more.
  • Having alcohol free days during the week is strongly advised.
  • These figures are for adults and NOT for young people under the age of 18yrs
  • For those aged 15-17yrs, all alcohol consumption should be with the guidance of a parent or carer or in a supervised environment.

It is illegal to sell alcohol to under 18’s in shops and bars

• If you choose to drink alcohol remain well hydrated. Try to space your drinks perhaps drinking a diet coke/sparkling water/tap water at the same time or between alcoholic drinks. A high blood glucose will make you pass urine frequently so you may become dehydrated.

• Spacing your drinks will also help you to pace yourself.
Alcohol and you

• Before going to bed check your blood glucose. Make sure that you have an large carbohydrate snack if you have been drinking alcohol during the evening. This will help to prevent nocturnal hypoglycaemia. Be cautious about giving any quick acting insulin as a correction before going to bed. **DO** remember to give your long acting insulin if you normally take this before bed.

• Always make sure that you stay with a responsible adult overnight who is aware that you have diabetes and can deal with nocturnal hypoglycaemia appropriately.

Please speak to the diabetes team for further information regard alcohol and diabetes management.

Contacts/Further information
www.nhs.uk/Livewell/alcohol
Alcohol concern: 0207 928 7377
E-mail: kidz.diabetes@addenbrookes.nhs.uk
Telephone: Monday – Friday 0900-1700 01223 274638
Out of hours: 01223 245151, ask for ‘child diabetes on rotawatch’.

We are now a smoke-free site: smoking will not be allowed anywhere on the hospital site. For advice and support in quitting, contact your GP or the free NHS stop smoking helpline on 0800 169 0 169.

Other formats:
If you would like this information in another language, large print or audio, please ask the department where you are being treated, to contact the patient information team: patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk.
Please note: We do not currently hold many leaflets in other languages; written translation requests are funded and agreed by the department who has authored the leaflet.

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