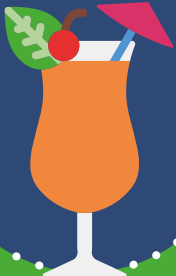
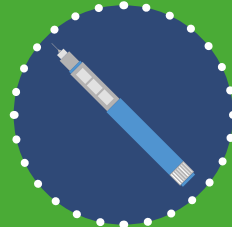
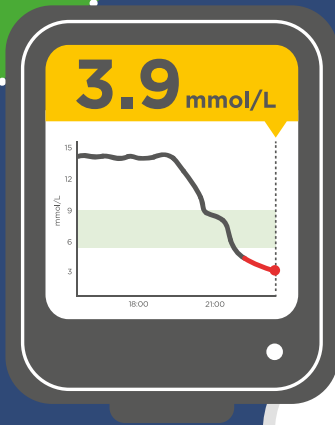


# Drinking alcohol with Type 1 diabetes

Developed as part of SEREN Connect diabetes education;  
supporting young people and young adults living with  
Type 1 diabetes





**Quality in Care**  
Diabetes Education Programme of the Year 2020

**Quality in Care**  
Diabetes Judge's Special Award 2020

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**With thanks to all who inspired, contributed,  
and believed in this programme.**

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**We're committed to creating resources that  
work for the people who use them.**

Please take a moment to provide us with  
some feedback. A few minutes of your time  
makes a really big difference.



# Alcohol and Type 1 diabetes

Whether you are counting down the days to your 18<sup>th</sup> birthday and being able to buy your first legal drink, or you are in your early twenties trying to juggle nights out whilst safely managing Type 1 diabetes, this SEREN Connect booklet can help.

Drinking alcohol has an effect on everyone and all young people need to ensure they stay safe. Taking the time to understand your body, and how it is affected by alcohol can help you reduce the risks.

Although many young people drink alcohol, many choose not to drink at all. You should never feel pressured to drink just to fit in.

If you haven't drunk any alcohol before, it is best to start slowly and learn how it affects you.



Everyone who drinks alcohol needs to take precautions to make sure they stay safe when drinking. But managing Type 1 diabetes as well, means there are extra things I need to think about.

**Becky, living with Type 1 diabetes**



# The law

The legal age to buy alcohol in the UK is 18 years old but if you look under 25 you will need to provide ID.

# The limit

**Knowing what you're drinking is important; the more information you have, the better you can reduce your risks while drinking and better manage your Type 1 diabetes.**

Alcohol is measured in units - 1 unit of alcohol is 10ml or 8g of pure alcohol.

The recommendations for over 18's are not to drink more than 14 units per week, spread these units over three or more days, and have some alcohol free days. It is not recommended to save all of your weekly units to drink in one day.



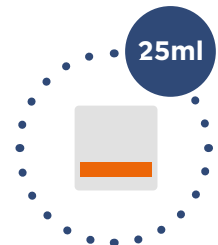
## REMEMBER

There are no safe drinking limit recommendations for under 18s.

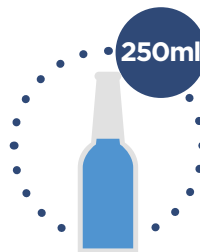
## What 1 unit looks like:



Standard 13% wine



Standard 40% spirit



Standard 4% alcopop (275ml)



Standard 4% beer

You can learn more about alcohol at [www.drinkaware.co.uk](http://www.drinkaware.co.uk)

# The effects of alcohol on blood glucose

## How much alcohol you're drinking depends on:

- The strength of the drink (e.g. there are strong beers and weaker beers)
- The size of the drink
- The number of drinks

”

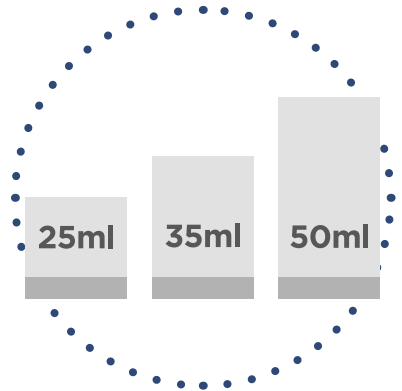
Spirits are commonly served in 25ml measures which equals 1 unit of alcohol, but some pubs and bars will serve 35ml or 50ml measures. So having an understanding to track your units is a good idea as they can soon mount up, and if you're not sure ask the bartender.

**Bartender**

”

Measurements at home or at parties are often larger than standard measures. Homemade punch or cocktails can contain a lot more alcohol. At house parties try to pour your own drinks, so you can keep track of your alcohol units and if the mixers or soft drinks contain sugar or not.

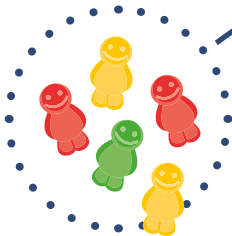
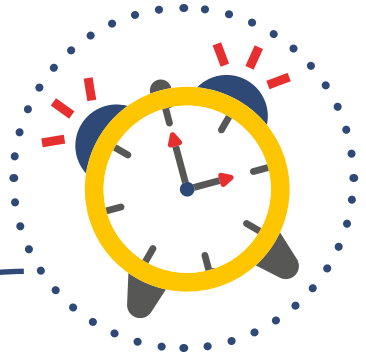
**Yvonne, healthcare professional**



## Alcohol can affect people very differently whether they have Type 1 diabetes or not.

Factors that you may need to consider when drinking alcohol and trying to manage your blood glucose level include:

- Your size
- Your age
- Your gender
- The type of alcohol
- Whether you've eaten any food
- Your activity levels



”

Some alcoholic drinks will drop my blood glucose levels quickly, while others will raise it first and then they may drop again at some point so it feels almost impossible for me to drink and stay in range after alcohol. I make sure I eat carbs before and after drinking; I know I'm more likely to hypo so I set a 3am alarm to wake and check my bloods and check more regularly the morning after.

**Andy, living with  
Type 1 diabetes**

# You are at an increased risk of hypo after drinking alcohol

Although most drinks that contain alcohol may cause your blood glucose to go up initially, **it can then come crashing down later on**. This is because the liver has to process the alcohol (a toxin) and stops releasing glucose in the usual way.

This can put you at a higher risk of a hypo and the effect can last for up to twelve hours after drinking.



”

It's not just the alcohol that affects me, I love to dance – so it's not uncommon for me to dance my way into a hypo on the dance floor!

**Charlie, living with Type 1 diabetes**

”

My hypo signs could sometimes be mistaken for 'being drunk' so I've talked to my friends about what to look out for and how to help me.

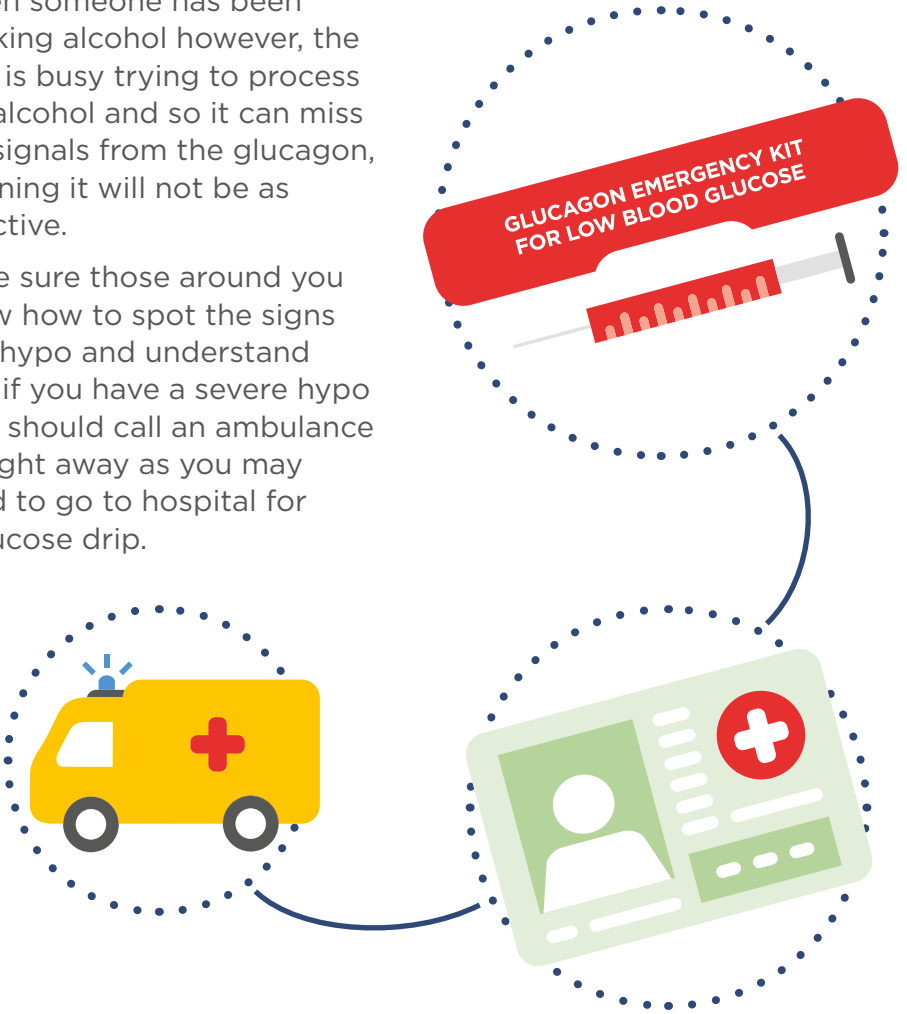
**Sophie, living with Type 1 diabetes**

# Glucagon doesn't work the same when you've been drinking alcohol

**A glucagon injection can be used when someone has a severe hypo. It stimulates the liver to release glucose stores which increases the blood glucose level.**

When someone has been drinking alcohol however, the liver is busy trying to process the alcohol and so it can miss the signals from the glucagon, meaning it will not be as effective.

Make sure those around you know how to spot the signs of a hypo and understand that if you have a severe hypo they should call an ambulance straight away as you may need to go to hospital for a glucose drip.



# Blood glucose swings when you are having fun

**Alcohol can cloud your judgement so you may act differently or make different decisions than you would when you are sober.**

## **This might include:**

- Not doing the things you normally would e.g. forgetting your background insulin
- Doing things you wouldn't usually do e.g. crashing at a friend's house without spare diabetes supplies or medication
- Engaging in risky behaviours e.g. taking recreational drugs or having unprotected sex

**Risk-taking is exactly that, a risk for everybody but the consequences for people living with Type 1 diabetes can be higher.**

It is possible to minimise these risks by making Type 1 diabetes planning an integral part of your day to day life.

Remember to ask for help if there are times where you feel this is too difficult or overwhelming. Lots of young adults go through periods where they find managing their Type 1 diabetes difficult and diabetes teams would rather you speak to them about your struggles than pretend they are not there.



Sometimes it's tempting to try to forget about my diabetes, but when I learn how to make space for it in all aspects of my life, I learn more about myself and managing it and I feel a lot better for it. It takes time but it's worth it.

**Olivia, living with Type 1 diabetes**



# Spikes – including the hidden ones!

**Watch your drinks – there is always the risk of your drink being spiked with alcohol or drugs if you leave it unattended.**

There is also no way of knowing how this will affect your diabetes as you're unlikely to be aware what was used to spike your drink.



”

There's two types of drink 'spikes' to be aware of when it comes to my Type 1 diabetes when I'm out. The first is protecting my drinks from potential drug spikes, the same as everyone else; the second is mixers - often bartenders mishear if I ask for 'diet' and I end up with more sugar than I've been aware of. This is difficult to manage but if you think it's the wrong drink, always ask for it to be changed if you aren't sure. I usually explain why and it's not been a problem for me.

**Dewi, living with  
Type 1 diabetes**

# Hangovers

**Sometimes, drinking too much alcohol can make you feel unwell especially the day after a heavy night of drinking. This is often called a hangover.**

If you're feeling unwell during your evening out, or hungover the day after, you may need to alter your diabetes management.

This may include adjusting your insulin or carbohydrate intake based on your blood glucose levels. Any disruption to your usual routine might impact your blood glucose levels.

A few examples could be – sleeping in later, being sick, eating at a different time or having a different amount of carbohydrate than usual.

Your diabetes team will be able to give you more individual advice.



# How to help yourself

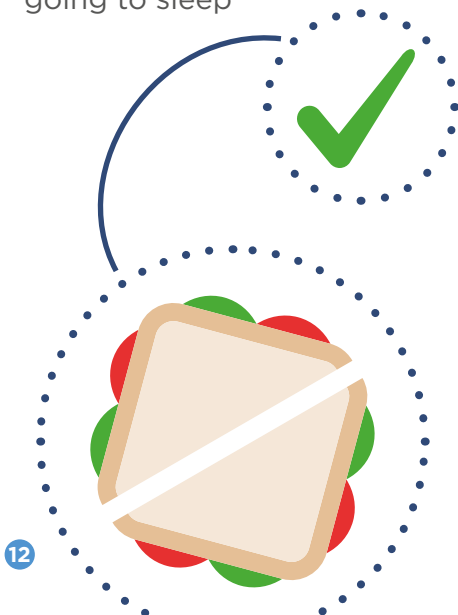
## #Type1tips

### Before you go out:

- Never drink on an empty stomach. Make sure you have some carbohydrate before going out
- Let your parents or someone else know where you're going and where you will be staying
- If you normally take your long acting insulin in the evening, have it before going out. Missing background insulin can make you very unwell and put you at risk of diabetic ketoacidosis (DKA)
- Sometimes it can help to prepare a snack you can eat when you get home before going to sleep

### When you are out:

- Take diabetes supplies with you (and keep them safe) - blood glucose kit, insulin and hypo treatment
- Wear/carry medical ID - on phone, in wallet or wear a medical alert band/necklace
- Tell friends - talk to them about hypos and how to spot and treat them
- There's safety in numbers - stay with friends and people you know well
- Pour your own drinks at house parties - keep track of alcohol and mixers
- Pace yourself - alternate alcohol drinks with non-alcohol drinks and drink water to keep well hydrated
- Watch your drinks to prevent it being spiked - never leave your drinks unattended
- Be aware you may not notice your usual hypo symptoms or they may change
- Dancing or using energy walking to a club/home can also increase your risk of hypos



## Before you go to sleep:

- Eat a snack containing carbohydrate before going to bed (or on the way home)
- Remember the increased risk of a hypo can last into the next morning
- Check your blood glucose level before going to sleep
- Keep any diabetes supplies you'll need near your bed for easy access at night
- Set an alarm during the night to wake up and check your blood glucose (consider asking a friend, partner or relative to check on you too where possible)
- Stay hydrated – drink water before going to sleep

## Smoking and vaping

**As you get older there will be lots of different choices to make in life. It is important that you have information on how these decisions might affect you and your health so that they can be informed decisions.**

Smoking carries a risk to everyone, but it's especially important to think twice about starting or continuing to smoke if you also live with Type 1 diabetes.

This is because Type 1 diabetes can increase the risk of cardiovascular (heart) disease and smoking increases this risk further.



The nicotine and chemicals such as tar and carbon monoxide in cigarettes make the blood vessels harden and narrow, reducing the blood flow around the body. This can increase your risk of developing diabetes complications in other parts of your body such as your eyes, kidneys or feet.

The current advice on e-cigarettes and vaping states 'the use of nicotine is unsafe, and harmful to health. It can cause addiction and harm the developing brain, and there are no benefits for children and young people to vape.'<sup>1</sup>

Nicotine found in cigarettes and vapes (or e-cigarettes) is addictive – and smoking is expensive!

Lots of young people try smoking for the first time when they are out with friends. If you find yourself in this situation, it is important that you don't feel you have to give in to peer pressure or try something to fit in.

Always remember - be honest about your smoking status when asked by your GP or healthcare team, as it can sometimes affect the medications or treatment available to you.

<sup>1</sup>Public health Wales, 2017

If you are a smoker and need support to give up, talk to your GP or to your diabetes team and they can point you in the direction of services which help, or visit: [www.helpmequit.wales](http://www.helpmequit.wales) for more information.

”

I remember being offered my first cigarette by a boy older than me at school. I didn't really want to and felt a bit pressured, but as soon as I said it wasn't good for my diabetes, he stopped. What's more, he didn't allow anyone else to pressurise me the next time either.

I think that's the first time it worked in my favour!

**Ffion, living with  
Type 1 diabetes**



# Drugs and substance misuse

You may have had substance misuse education at school, where you would have learned about the different types of drugs, and the effects they can have on the body.

It's important to know that drugs can have additional effects on your Type 1 diabetes management and blood glucose levels. **These effects are hard to predict.**

Some drugs are legal to buy (although have age restrictions) such as alcohol, nicotine, and caffeine. Others are illegal for example cannabis, cocaine, and ecstasy. There are lots more and most have different street names which can differ depending on where you live.

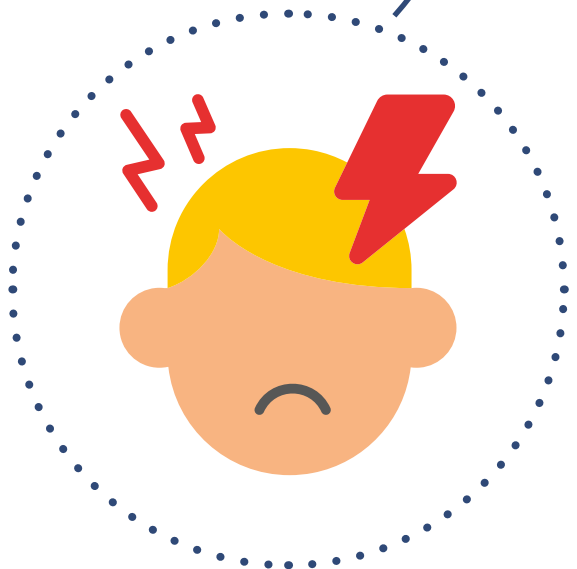
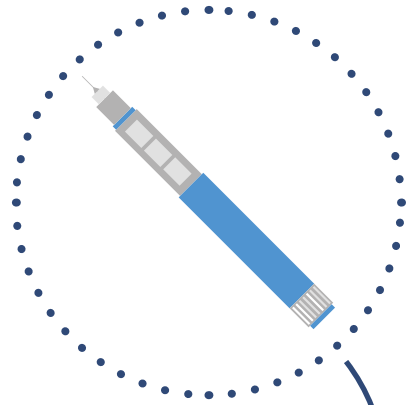
**No drug is a safe drug; and you should never feel pressured into taking anything you don't want to.**

The impact they will have on you will differ depending on the type of drug taken. You can learn more about the different types of drugs and find local services that can give you advice and support at:  
**[www.DAN247.org.uk](http://www.DAN247.org.uk)**  
or by texting **DAN** to **81066**

## When it comes to managing Type 1 diabetes, being under the influence of drugs can impair your judgement and could land you in tricky situations.

### Things to think about:

- You may forget to take your insulin or take the wrong dose
- Your appetite may be affected and you may eat more/less than you usually would
- You may miscalculate your carbohydrate
- You may miss or mistake your hypo symptoms
- You may forget to take your diabetes kit with you
- You may feel you want to dance and use more energy than you expected
- You may feel unwell and this can impact how you are able to manage your blood glucose



**Whilst taking any illegal drugs is not recommended, if you do decide to then the following may help to reduce your risks:**

- Never feel pressured into taking drugs
- Make sure you know exactly what you are taking
- Don't mix the types of drugs you are taking (this includes alcohol)
- Stay with friends
- Wear or carry medical ID that lets people know that you live with Type 1 diabetes
- Drink plenty of fluids, including soft drinks or water
- Make sure you eat some carbohydrate before you go out, and again when you come home
- Keep an eye on your blood glucose levels to help you avoid hypos or highs
- Make sure you are able to get home safely
- If you do find yourself in a difficult situation, be honest about what you have taken so that those trying to help you can make sure you get the best and appropriate help

**(This list is not exhaustive)**



## **Useful links and contacts**

**You can find out more about managing diabetes and drugs using:**

**[www.bertieonline.org.uk](http://www.bertieonline.org.uk)**

DAN 24/7 Wales Drug and Alcohol Helpline:

**0800 633 5588**

Free text **DAN** to **81066**

**[www.dan247.org.uk](http://www.dan247.org.uk)**

# Notes

## Other SEREN Connect Resources

**Learning to drive and driving safely with Type 1 diabetes**

Developed as part of SEREN Connect diabetes education, supporting young people and young adults living with Type 1 diabetes

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**Managing Type 1 diabetes: post-school, at university and in the workplace**

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**Pregnancy, parenting and Type 1 diabetes**

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**Sex, relationships and Type 1 diabetes**

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**Travel, events and festivals with Type 1 diabetes**

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**Understanding Type 1 diabetes, kidney health and nephropathy**

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