

How alcohol affects blood sugar levels in people with diabetes

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INTRODUCTION

Diabetes is a chronic condition that affects the body's ability to regulate blood sugar levels. Managing blood glucose is key to preventing complications associated with diabetes, such as heart disease, nerve damage, and kidney failure. Alcohol is metabolized by the liver, which prioritizes breaking down alcohol over other metabolic processes, including the regulation of blood sugar.

DESCRIPTION

When a person drinks alcohol, the liver focuses on processing the alcohol, which can interfere with its ability to release glucose into the bloodstream. This can lead to a drop in blood sugar, especially if the person hasn't eaten or has low glycogen stores. The result can be hypoglycemia (low blood sugar), which can cause symptoms like shakiness, confusion, dizziness, and even fainting or seizures if left untreated. However, the impact of alcohol on blood sugar levels is not always straightforward. The effect varies based on several factors, including the type of alcohol consumed, the amount, the timing, and whether it is consumed with food. For instance, drinks like beer and sweet cocktails (which contain sugar) can cause a more immediate rise in blood glucose levels, while pure spirits like vodka or whiskey typically do not contain carbohydrates, meaning they have a more neutral effect on blood sugar in the short term. Hypoglycemia, or low blood sugar, is one of the most significant risks of alcohol consumption for people with diabetes. This is particularly dangerous because the symptoms of hypoglycemia—such as dizziness, confusion, and shakiness—are similar to the effects of alcohol intoxication. As a result, individuals may not recognize the signs of low blood sugar, which can delay treatment and increase the risk of severe complications. To reduce the risk of hypoglycemia, individuals with diabetes should always consume alcohol with food. A balanced meal

or snack containing carbohydrates, protein, and healthy fats can help maintain stable blood sugar levels and provide a buffer against alcohol's blood sugar-lowering effects. These drinks can cause an immediate spike in blood glucose levels, which may be problematic for people with diabetes trying to manage their blood sugar. Additionally, excessive alcohol consumption can contribute to poor lifestyle choices, such as overeating, lack of physical activity, and poor medication adherence, all of which can cause blood sugar levels to rise. Over time, chronic heavy drinking can lead to insulin resistance, making it harder for the body to regulate blood glucose, and possibly contributing to the development or worsening of type 2 diabetes. The liver plays a crucial role in blood sugar regulation, particularly when blood glucose levels are low. It stores glucose in the form of glycogen and releases it into the bloodstream when needed. However, when the liver is busy metabolizing alcohol, it becomes less efficient at performing this task. This can result in prolonged hypoglycemia, especially if the person has not eaten or if their liver glycogen stores are depleted due to fasting or exercise. Chronic alcohol consumption can also lead to liver damage, such as fatty liver disease or cirrhosis, which can further impair the liver's ability to regulate blood sugar. For people with diabetes, this can create a vicious cycle where both liver dysfunction and blood sugar imbalances are exacerbated.

CONCLUSION

Alcohol can have both short-term and long-term effects on blood sugar levels in people with diabetes. While moderate drinking may not significantly affect blood sugar for everyone, it is important to be aware of the potential risks, particularly the increased chance of hypoglycemia. By choosing the right drinks, consuming alcohol with food, and monitoring blood sugar levels, individuals with diabetes can reduce the risks associated with alcohol consumption.

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