



# Alcohol and Chronic Kidney Disease

When it comes to drinking alcohol, moderation is the key. Drinking too much alcohol—even for a completely healthy person—can cause heart disease, liver disease, [high blood pressure](#) and [kidney disease](#), in addition to many other medical problems. Drinking too much alcohol can also impair judgment—and this could interfere with decision making related to remembering to take medicines and following fluid and diet guidelines.

## Renal diets and alcohol

Moderate alcohol drinking may be okay for people with chronic kidney disease (CKD) who are not on dialysis. However, it’s best to first check with your [nephrologist](#) or renal dietitian to find out if alcohol is safe for you. If you’re able to drink alcohol safely, your healthcare team will advise you on the types and amounts that are right for you.

If you’re on [dialysis](#), drinking alcohol may be allowable, but it must be counted within your normal fluid allowance and diet, and medicines must be taken into consideration. Talk to your doctor or dietitian before you drink any alcohol.

For those with [diabetes](#) and CKD, alcohol may be safe to drink if you have your blood sugar level under control. After getting the okay to drink from your doctor or dietitian, it is recommended that you drink with food. Alcohol on an empty stomach can cause blood sugar levels to drop in those with diabetes. Additional ingredients in mixed drinks may add carbohydrate that must be considered. You will also have to fit alcohol into your meal plan.

Alcohol has no nutritional benefit, but it does have calories which can add up quickly. Take this into consideration when planning your daily menus.

Some medicines, both prescription and over-the-counter, may interact with alcohol. and cause the medicines not to work properly. There are other medicines that may cause your blood alcohol level to rise. Check drug labels and ask your pharmacist or doctor to review your medications to make sure alcohol will not be harmful with your medication.

## Safe levels of drinking

The federal government’s Dietary Guidelines for Americans defines moderate drinking as:

- one drink per day for women and older people
- two drinks per day for men

The limits are different for men and women, because men usually weigh more and alcohol is processed differently by the sexes. Women tend to have a stronger reaction to alcohol. One reason is that women have less water in their bodies, so the alcohol becomes more concentrated. The risk for alcohol-related diseases is also higher in women than in men.

The following count as one drink and each contains the same amount of alcohol:

- 12 ounces of beer or wine cooler
- 5 ounces of wine
- 1.5 ounces of 80-proof distilled spirits (whiskey, bourbon, scotch, vodka, gin, tequila, rum)

## To drink or not to drink

Drinking alcohol can generally be done safely in moderation, even if you have CKD, [polycystic kidney disease](#), [end stage renal disease \(ESRD\)](#), or diabetes. Take caution, however, if you have high blood pressure. Also, be aware of ingredients and nutrient content of the beverage you choose to drink. Always check with your doctor or renal dietitian to make sure it is safe for you to drink alcohol.

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