

Diabetes

NEWS

Baptist-South Miami Diabetes Care Centers

October — December 2004

Diabetes and drinking

You're at a holiday party. Everyone around you is drinking, but you have diabetes. Is it safe for you to consume alcohol?

The danger is not what most people think — high blood sugar. Instead, alcohol mixed with diabetes medication, either insulin or certain pills, can lead to dangerously low blood-sugar levels (hypoglycemia). Since low blood sugar produces symptoms similar to intoxication, you may be fooled into thinking you are slightly drunk when in fact you may be headed for a severely low blood-sugar reaction.

But it is OK for someone with diabetes to have a drink or two at a party if they take proper precautions. The American Diabetes Association suggests not more than one "serving" per day for women, and two for men. A "serving" is one beer, 4 ounces of wine, or

1.5 ounces of distilled spirits.

So what happens if you have diabetes and you drink? Normally, your liver produces a steady supply of glucose, especially at night, when you are not eating. If you have diabetes, you take insulin and/or oral medications to lower the sugar levels in your blood. So there is a balance: The liver produces glucose and the medication keeps it at a safely low level.

But when the liver senses alcohol, it shifts function and attempts to detoxify your body by removing the alcohol from the bloodstream. Meanwhile, it is not producing sugar. So if you are taking medication to reduce your glucose levels while the liver is not producing any, you may reach dangerously low levels.

The liver can work from eight to 12 hours ridding your body of alcohol. Since these hours normally are the ones following an evening affair, your blood sugar may drop very low while you are asleep. You would recognize and treat the symptoms if you were awake, but perhaps the symptoms would not wake you, particularly after a long, tiring party at which you've had a drink or two.

Here are some rules to improve your chances of safe drinking:

- First, at a party, always make sure someone is aware that you have diabetes and knows how to recognize hypoglycemia and help you treat it by giving you carbohydrates. Tell them not to assume you are a bit drunk, but rather know that you are having a low blood-sugar reaction. They must be told that if you appear

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Upcoming programs

Mark your calendars for these two programs.

- **"Living Healthfully with Diabetes,"** a program in Spanish with certified diabetes educator Matilde Lewis, R.N., will take place **Tuesday, Nov. 9, from 6:30-7:30 p.m.**, at the Center for Informed Families, 2490 Coral Way. The program is free, but reservations are necessary. Call **786-596-3814**.

- **"Type 2 Diabetes in Children,"** part of the Baptist Children's Hospital parenting series, will be offered **Thursday, Nov. 18**, in the Baptist Hospital Auditorium, 8900 North Kendall Drive. The speaker will be certified diabetes educator Lois Exelbert, R.N., administrator of the Baptist Hospital Diabetes Care Center. The program is \$5. Call **786-596-3812** to RSVP.



Baptist Hospital & Baptist Children's Hospital
786-596-3696



South Miami Hospital • 786-662-5168
Homestead Hospital • 786-596-3696

From the Administrator

When you make up your holiday shopping list this year, think in terms of gifts that will help your loved ones stay healthy. It's time we started thinking like that, with so many of us — even our children — combating obesity, which can increase the risks of heart disease and diabetes.

For example, I've recently started sitting on an exercise ball at my desk. Even though I am sitting and working, I am also burning calories by creating balance. I'm strengthening my back and abdominal muscles and bouncing on the ball simply because it's fun! My exercise ball can be found at stores for about \$15 or \$20.

You can invest in expensive items like treadmills, Stairmasters and home gyms, but those are beyond most people's gift-buying budget. But what about a one-month member-

ship to an exercise program? You can get one that combines exercise and nutrition education right here at the Diabetes Care Center.

What about some hand weights to use while watching TV? Or an outdoor bicycle or skateboard? Remember hula hoops? They were a great, inexpensive way to burn calories and whittle down your waist. There's a whole new generation waiting to try them for the first time!

Doesn't it give you a warm tingle at the thought of giving a healthful gift? Why don't you pick up something for yourself, too! Happy, healthy holidays to all!

Lois Exelbert, R.N., CDE

Administrator

Diabetes Care Center, Baptist Hospital

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ill or begin vomiting, you will need medical help. If you become unconscious, they should not try to feed you. Instead, they should seek medical help immediately.

- Never drink on an empty stomach. Take your drink with a meal, or with snacks containing carbohydrates, such as pretzels or crackers. Prepare your own drinks, if possible, so you know how much alcohol you're getting. Most important, drink slowly!

- Avoid sweet liqueurs, drink mixes, juices or regular soda. Instead, mix drinks with diet soda, club soda or vegetable juice. But locate fruit juice and regular soda so you can reach it quickly if you need a quick carbohydrate boost.

- Choose light beers over regular beer. Drink water or a non-caloric beverage between alcoholic beverages. Carry a quick-acting carbohydrate, such as three glucose tablets or candy.

- Monitor blood sugar every few hours, especially if the party includes increased physical activity, such as dancing, playing sports or swimming, that can further lower your blood sugar. Remember that even one drink may affect you differently than people without diabetes, so always have a designated driver lined up.

- Have a snack before getting into bed, even if your blood sugar is slightly high. Set the alarm clock to ring halfway through the night, or have a family member wake you, to check your

blood sugar. Eat a carbohydrate-containing snack if blood sugar is below 100mg/dl.

Ask your doctor if alcohol could interfere with medications you are taking, or call the Diabetes Care Center at South Miami Hospital, **786-662-5168**, or at Baptist Hospital, **786-596-3696**. Safety should be your main concern because alcohol can cloud your judgment.

After having read all this, you may decide that alcohol is not worth the risks! But if you choose to drink at a holiday party, you can be safe by being careful.

Zulia Escobar, R.D.

Diabetes Team Nutritionist

South Miami Hospital

Walk for Diabetes

America's Walk for Diabetes will be held in Miami-Dade County this year after many years in Broward. It will take place **Saturday, Nov.13**, at the Miami Seaquarium. Set up your own team or register to walk for our Diabetes Care Center team! It's a great way to raise money for diabetes and get your exercise at the same time. For details, visit the website at www.diabetes.org/walk, or call the Diabetes Care Center at Baptist Hospital at **786-596-3696**, or South Miami Hospital at **786-662-5168**.



Pain-relieving cream?

L-Arginine, an amino acid, may reduce painful foot symptoms in patients with diabetes if applied as a cream. We already know that it is beneficial for healing leg ulcers secondary to diabetes.

L-Arginine is marketed as everything from a sex-enhancer to a cure for wrinkles and baldness. In recent studies, it has demonstrated an ability to stimulate the development of nitric oxide, which both reduces pain and increases local blood flow.

While the full scope of the potential mechanism of L-Arginine remains unknown, it was combined in recent tests with Capsaicin, a commonly used topical analgesic. Capsaicin relieves pain by a separate mechanism than L-Arginine, and the combination seemed to be effective in the study.

Capsaicin is readily available without a prescription in the pharmacy. L-Arginine as a cream also is available over-the-counter in a product called DiabetiDerm, but we do not know the effectiveness of these two products used separately. The product in the tests that combined the two ingredients is called Healthibetic foot cream, sold on the internet from Strategic Science and Technologies at www.healthibetic.com. The treatment in the tests consisted of applying the cream directly to the painful area every four hours for 12 to 16 hours, and then reducing to a schedule of twice-daily applications.

The study did not involve the pain and poor circulation of neuropathy of the feet that is a common complication of diabetes. It was tested on chronic neck and shoulder pain. Nevertheless, there is hope that topical L-Arginine will reduce the painful foot symptoms in patients with diabetes.

In addition to relief from pain, patients using L-Arginine found that their skin became warm after 10-15 minutes and stayed warm for up to 18 hours. This may demonstrate increased blood flow, which is another important concern in patients with diabetes.

While preliminary studies are promising, the benefits of topical L-Arginine have not been proven and the mechanism of action is not completely known. However, the product appears to be quite safe, so there would be no harm in giving it a try to address the symptoms of pain and poor circulation in the feet of people with diabetes.

Ira M. Baum, DPM

Extra snacks really count!

The things we eat on the run, the little snacks we grab without thinking, really do count. The formula is simple and cruel. Eating an extra 3,500 calories will add one pound.



It doesn't take much to slowly gain five, 10 or even 20 pounds over a few years. Then we look back and ask: "How did that happen?"

So when you're cooking dinner, preparing lunch for the kids or cleaning up after a meal, remember this: 3,500 calories = one pound. Consider these scenarios and see if you recognize yourself:

Mom prepares lunch for the kids each day.

As she packs the lunchboxes, she eats two cookies herself, which have 80 calories each. Those two cookies could add up to more than 10 pounds in one year.

At the office, you are constantly tempted by chocolate, popcorn, peanuts and doughnuts.

You grab an ounce of peanuts or a piece of chocolate going in one direction, and a handful of popcorn on the way back. Do this daily and you could add five pounds within a month.

There are not enough leftovers to save. As you head for the trash you hear your mother's voice in your head: "Don't waste food — there are starving children in the world!" So you pop the last few pieces in your mouth. Cleaning up like that after meals could mean five pounds within three months.

So if you can't lose those extra pounds even though you are eating healthily and exercising daily, the answer may be in the crumbs in the bottom of the bag, or licking the knife after making a peanut butter sandwich for the kids. These hidden calories can quickly add up.

Mercy Molina, R.D., CDE

*Diabetes Nutrition Educator
Baptist Hospital*

Cruise Update

Cruise the Baltic and join doctors and nurses and people with diabetes in discussing the latest in diabetes care. The 8th Diabetes Cruise Symposium departs Copenhagen on June 26, 2005, on the *Costa Atlantica* and returns there July 3 after visiting ports in Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Russia and Estonia. Prices start at \$1,199 per person (excluding air fare). For more information, call Anna Izaguirre at **786-596-4840**.



Support group meetings

All programs are free unless otherwise indicated.

SOUTH MIAMI

HOSPITAL — Victor E. Clarke Education Center, U.S. 1 and SW 62 Avenue. Call **786-662-5168** to register.



Diabetes Support Group — 3-4 p.m., first Wednesday of the month, Classroom C.

Insulin Pump Support Group — 7-8:30 p.m., third Thursday of the month, Classroom D.

BAPTIST HOSPITAL — 8900 N. Kendall Drive. Call **786-596-3696** to register.

Adult Diabetes Support Group — 1:30-2:30 p.m., first Thursday of the month, Diabetes Classroom, 3 Main West.

Adult Spanish Support Group — 1:30-2:30 p.m., third Thursday of the month, Diabetes Classroom, 3 Main West.

BAPTIST CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL — 8900 N. Kendall Drive. Call **786-596-3696** to register.

Does the concept of a Parent/Child Support Group interest you? If so, call Debbie Gillman, R.N., at **786-596-3696**.

Teen/Preteen Support Group — A 10-week support series for teens and preteens, led by Gary X. Lancelotta, Ph.D., and Debbie Gillman, R.N. A \$50 fee covers both participation and a required initial screening by the psychology staff. For information about times and dates, call **786-596-3696**.

HOMESTEAD HOSPITAL — 160 NW 13 St., Homestead. Call **786-596-3696** to register.

Diabetes Support Group — 6-7 p.m., first Tuesday of the month, Education Center.

Grocery tour

Take a tour of Publix with an expert from the Diabetes Care Center at Baptist Hospital and learn how to read food labels and make wise food choices. The four-week program starts **Tuesday, Nov. 2**, and continues the first Tuesday of each month from 7-8:30 p.m. at the Publix Supermarket near Dadeland/MetroRail Station. The cost is \$50 for all four sessions. Call **786-596-3696** to register.



Diabetes News is published quarterly for the friends of Baptist-South Miami Diabetes Care Centers. The Centers are recognized by the American Diabetes Association. If you'd like to make an appointment at any of our six convenient locations, call **786-596-3696** at Baptist Hospital or **786-662-5168** at South Miami Hospital. For a referral to a physician specializing in diabetes care, call the Physician Referral Service at **786-596-6557**. You can also visit us online at www.baptisthealth.net. If you prefer not to receive future issues of *Diabetes News*, please call us at **786-596-6534**, or e-mail diabetes@baptisthealth.net.



**Baptist Health
South Florida**

**Baptist-South Miami
Diabetes Care Centers**

8940 North Kendall Drive
Suite 803-E
Miami, FL 33176

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