

Alcohol & CF

Alcohol is a big part of socialising for many people, whether it's parties, dinners, or celebrations. Enjoying a drink can feel normal but drinking too much or too often can cause serious health problems. If you have CF, the risks are even higher. That's why it's super important to chat with your CF care team about whether drinking is safe for you.

Why alcohol can be risky with CF

Alcohol puts extra pressure on parts of your body that are already working hard because of CF, like your lungs, digestive system, and liver. It is known to reduce respiratory function, making it harder to clear mucus. It can also make you dehydrated, disrupt how your body absorbs nutrients, and even interact with your CF meds.

Alcohol & medications

Alcohol can affect how certain medications work including antibiotics and CFTR modulators. It can make them less effective or cause unwanted side effects. Talk to your team about how the effects of alcohol on any other medications you are taking.

Antibiotics

It is best to avoid alcohol when on antibiotics as it can worsen side effects like nausea, dizziness and vomiting. It can also make them less effective as it impacts absorption.

CFTR Modulators

CFTR modulators and alcohol are both processed by the liver so heavy or frequent drinking can increase the risk of liver inflammation or damage, which might make modulators less effective.



If you're on modulators, keep alcohol to a minimum and get your liver checked regularly.

Digestive system

Alcohol can irritate the lining of your stomach and intestines, and put extra stress on the liver and pancreas, slowing the movement of food through the gut. Moderate alcohol intake is unlikely to completely block enzyme absorption, but heavy or chronic use can reduce enzyme effectiveness. It can also reduce appetite making it easier to skip meals or forget enzymes.

Do you need to take pancreatic enzymes with alcohol?

A lot of alcoholic drinks like spirits and sugary pre-mixed drinks don't need enzymes as they don't contain fat, complex carbohydrates or protein.

However, drinks containing things like milk or cream, including milky liqueurs, or snacks that are often eaten along with alcohol, will require enzymes. Not all alcoholic drinks will have a nutrition information panel. Use a nutrition app to see if enzymes are needed.

Pancreatitis

Alcohol can trigger or worsen pancreatitis, a painful inflammation of the pancreas. People with CF are more prone to pancreatitis because their pancreatic ducts are already narrowed or blocked by thick mucus, and alcohol adds extra stress.

CFRD

Alcohol can lower blood sugar levels, sometimes unpredictably, which increases the risk of hypoglycaemia (a hypo) if you have cystic fibrosis related diabetes (CFRD). Sugary drinks, like cocktails or ciders, can cause blood glucose to spike before dropping later. Additionally, vomiting after drinking can make blood sugar harder to manage and may interfere with medication absorption.

Symptoms of low blood sugar (such as dizziness, confusion, or weakness) can also look similar to being drunk, which may make it harder to recognise and treat a hypo episode quickly. Make sure you have some snacks on hand and someone with you knows how to help if low blood sugar occurs.

Tips if you have CFRD:

- Don't drink on an empty stomach
- Pick lower-sugar drinks
- Check your blood sugar regularly
- Talk to your diabetes team about a safe plan

Dehydration

Alcohol causes dehydration which can then worsen common CF issues, including thicker mucus secretions, digestive problems, and a higher risk of pancreatitis. Make sure you drink plenty of water to help manage this risk and keep an eye out for the early signs of dehydration including thirst, dry mouth and dark urine.

Tips for managing alcohol and CF

Speak to your CF team about alcohol and how it might affect your health and impact your CF symptoms. Depending on the medications you're on, other conditions you are managing, as well as physical and mental health factors, your team will be able to give specific advice.

If you choose to drink, some things to consider are:

- Understand how alcohol affects the medications you are taking
- Take enzymes with drinks that contain fat or protein
- Avoid binge drinking
- Stay hydrated by drinking water between alcoholic drinks
- Eat before as well as during drinking to help reduce stomach irritation and support more stable digestion.
- Consider lower alcohol options

Useful resources

- [Drinking alcohol and CF](#) (CF Trust)
- [How alcohol affects your health](#) (Health Direct)