

How Much in Too Much?: Assessing Alcohol Intake in Clinical Practice

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Alcohol use and diabetes

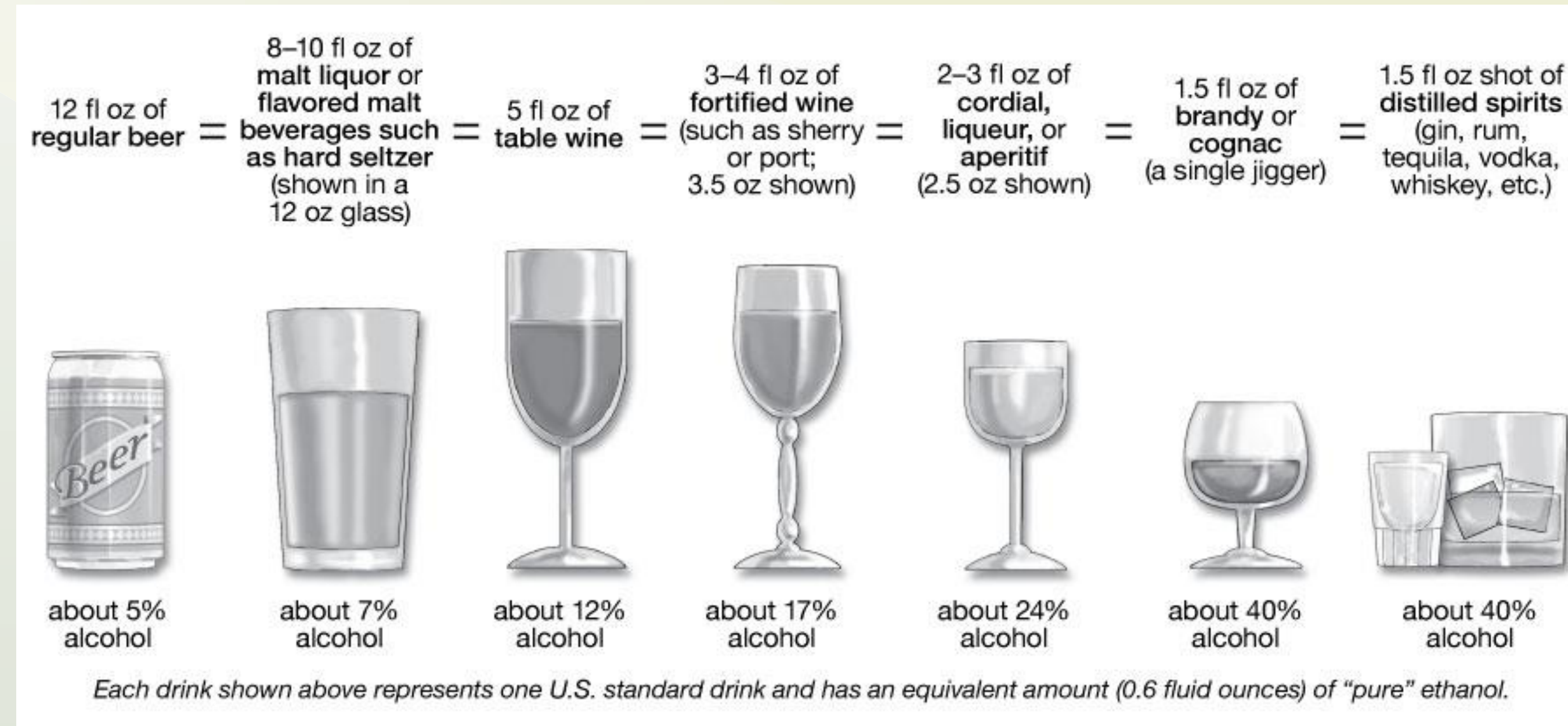
Alcohol use in persons with diabetes presents the potential for hypoglycemia, poor nutrition, and the possible synergistic effects of alcohol and wide variety of medications on the body.

A thorough assessment of alcohol usage is critical when providing quality diabetes education to assist in treatment planning and the prevention of barriers to care.

Assessing alcohol usage

- Ask open-ended questions such as, "Tell me about your alcohol intake?"
- Follow up with clarifying questions regarding amounts and frequency
- Look for non-verbal cues as alcohol is discussed. Sometimes the mouth says "no," but the face says "yes!"
- Do not rely on paper or computer questionnaires as your only assessment tools. Ask directly.
- To help increase reliability, ask tweens and teens about alcohol use without parents present, such as when taking them for a weight check.
- Avoid judgment

Standard serving sizes



What is considered "heavy drinking"?

MEN: More than 4 drinks per day AND more than 14 drinks per week

WOMEN: More than 3 drinks per day AND more than 7 drinks per week

OVER 65 YEARS OLD?: More than 3 drinks per day AND more than 7 drinks per week

9% of US adults exceed BOTH the single-day AND the weekly limits

19% of US adults exceed EITHER the single-day or the weekly limits

Source: National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism

Alcohol use and diabetes management

- Encourage patients to be honest with treatment team about their intake as certain medication suggestions may be altered based upon risk factors posed by individual intake
- Educate carefully about the blood-glucose lowering effects of most alcohol
- Remind patients alcohol has calories without nutritional benefits, thus may increase weight
- Severe hypoglycemia and alcohol intoxication present similarly

Assisting patients to cut down

- Help patients set realistic and specific goals for cutting back
- Encourage "nursing" drinks
- Alternate alcoholic beverages with non-alcoholic
- Stay away from the bar area at social events
- Avoid people, places, and things that spur increased alcohol intake
- If attempts at cutting down are not successful, help patient find alcohol counseling resources