

Alcohol and recreational drug use in young adults with type 1 diabetes - doing harm reduction in people with medical comorbidities

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Introduction: For those with Type 1 diabetes (T1D), navigating the transition from adolescence to young adulthood while maintaining blood glucose control is challenging. As alcohol and drug use prevalence peaks, concerns have been raised regarding the impact of substances on the deterioration of blood glucose control and early mortality in T1D. We performed qualitative, quantitative and a prospective flash glucose monitoring study to explore the experiences of young adults with T1D who use substances.

Methods: Study 1 is a qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews (n=16) focused on substance using experiences and harm minimisation tools. Study 2 is a quantitative study (n= 96) of substance use prevalence and effects of substances on blood glucose control. Study 3 is a survey of clinicians (n=79) and their approach to screening and intervention. Study 4 is a prospective study using flash glucose monitoring (n=20) to explore the 'real world' effect of substance use on blood glucose metrics.

Key Findings: Overall the study results document the experiences of young adults with T1D while drinking alcohol and using recreational drugs. This cohort employs numerous harm minimisation techniques specific to T1D, however, flash glucose monitoring indicates that even those with good metabolic control remain at risk of acute harm following drug and alcohol use.

Conclusions: This research should encourage clinicians to screen young adults with T1D for alcohol and drug use and to counsel them regarding potential specific harm reduction measures. The findings allow for more nuanced conversations with this subgroup regarding the particular risks of substance use and how they can be mitigated.

Implications for Practice or Policy: Clinicians should more broadly consider the medical comorbidities of the young adults they see in practice, consider the effect of substance use on that condition and any specific measures that can be used to reduce any potential harm.

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