

ADULT BIRTHDAY PARTY CHECKLIST

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BAR RULE 1 drink per person per hour. Always serve food alongside alcohol. Always offer a non-alcoholic option. Stop bar service 1 hour before end. Ice = 1.5 lbs/guest. Buy 10-15% extra alcohol — store takes returns on unopened.

■ 4-6 Weeks Before

- Set the date — weekends book up fast
- Set budget — venue 30-40%, food/bar 40-50%
- Book venue — popular spaces fill months ahead
Milestone birthdays: start 8-12 weeks out
- Choose party format and vibe
- Draft and finalize guest list
- Send invitations or save-the-dates
Milestone birthdays: send save-the-dates 6-8 wks out
- Book entertainment — DJ, band, photo booth
Good DJs book weeks to months in advance
- Order birthday cake — 2-3 weeks minimum lead
- Plan photo opportunity — backdrop, neon sign, etc.

■ 2-3 Weeks Before

- Track RSVPs — follow up non-responders
- Finalize food menu — use calculator for quantities
- Order or buy decorations
- Plan bar setup — quantities, mixers, glassware
- Create playlist or brief the DJ
Build playlist 2 weeks out to add/remove as you go
- Plan party favors if giving them
- Arrange transportation plan for guests with alcohol
Mention rideshare in the invitation
- Create event timeline
- Arrange photographer or designate a friend
The host usually ends up with the fewest photos
- Confirm venue with deposit and logistics

■ 1 Week Before

- Lock in final guest count
- Buy all non-perishable food ingredients
- Buy all alcohol — 10-15% over calculated amount
Most stores take returns on unopened bottles
- Buy tableware in theme colors
- Confirm cake order with bakery
- Make or buy homemade decorations
- Prepare make-ahead food — dips, marinades
- Print menu cards and any signage
- Buy ice — 1 to 1.5 lbs per guest
Ice is the most underestimated party supply
- Confirm all vendor bookings

■ Day Before

- Decorate venue if accessible
Use foil balloons — helium deflates overnight
- Prepare all make-ahead food
- Chill all wine, beer, and non-alcoholic drinks
- Pre-batch cocktail or punch base
Add carbonation day-of — never the night before
- Set up bar area — bottles, glasses, garnishes
- Plan food table layout
- Charge all devices — speakers, phone, photo booth
- Confirm vendor arrival times with helpers
- Confirm cake pickup logistics
- Lay out your own outfit

■ Party Day — Setup

- Arrive 90 minutes before guests
- Inflate and arrange final decorations
- Set up bar — ice, bottles, glassware, garnishes
- Arrange food table with height variation
Risers and tiered stands make the spread look fuller
- Add ice to coolers and bar buckets
- Start playlist — confirm opening songs
- Pick up cake — transport level, in AC
Buttercream melts around 85°F
- Set out hot food last — within 30 min of guests
- Do final venue walkthrough — take 'before' photo
- Assign helper to greet guests and manage bar
- Monitor food and bar — refill before half-empty
- Cake cutting: 60-90 min in — coordinate with toast

■ Bar & Responsible Hosting

- Always offer a non-alcoholic signature drink
Non-drinkers deserve a thoughtful option, not just water
- Keep water accessible at all times
- Always serve food alongside alcohol
Never run an open bar with no food service
- Mention rideshare options on invitation or bar card
- Know venue last call time if applicable
- Label all bottles at self-serve bars
- Keep glassware clean throughout the event
- Set up coffee and tea station for later in the party
- Replace ice every 60-90 minutes
- Stop bar service 1 hour before end of party
Standard at professional events — a reasonable practice

■ Food Service

- Label every food item — allergen transparency
Nuts, dairy, shellfish, gluten are common allergens
- Keep cold foods below 40°F on ice
- Keep hot foods above 140°F in chafing dishes
- Discard food after 2 hours at room temp (1 hr at 90°F+)
USDA guideline — food safety danger zone 40-140°F
- Refill food before it drops below half
- Mix finger food and fork food options
- Trash stations near food and bar areas
- Extra napkins within arm's reach of food table

■ PRO BIRTHDAY PARTY TIPS

- Plan 1 drink per person per hour. Buy 10-15% more alcohol — stores take returns on unopened bottles.
- Ice = 1.5 lbs per guest minimum. It is the most underestimated supply and the cheapest to over-buy.
- Always serve food alongside alcohol and always offer a thoughtful non-alcoholic option.
- Stop bar service 1 hour before the scheduled end time — a responsible practice guests appreciate.
- The host takes the fewest photos. Assign one person specifically to photograph from start to finish.

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