

the

# RED CUP

Q&A



separating alcohol fact from fiction  
EVERY TUESDAY IN THE DAILY WILDCAT

## Q Does alcohol make you lose brain cells?

**A.** Like your most annoying sibling, the liver seems to get all the attention. What's a brain got to do to get noticed?

All kidding aside, research shows that significant brain development continues through adolescence and well into young adulthood. Heavy alcohol use can impair brain function in college aged students and adolescents need only drink half as much as adults to suffer the same negative effects. Many scientists are concerned that drinking during this critical developmental period could lead to lifelong impairments in brain function, especially regarding functions of memory, motor skills, impulse control, coordination, planning and decision making. As brain functions go, these are all pretty important, eh?!

Trust me; no one wants to have the smallest hippocampus on campus. Size does matter. Those who abuse alcohol have significantly smaller hippocampi. This area of the brain suffers the worst alcohol brain damage in teenagers and young adults. Damage to the hippocampus makes it hard to learn and hold on to knowledge.

Another major contributor to short and long-term brain function is binge drinking. College students who have a higher propensity for bingeing will often suffer repeated bouts of withdrawal from alcohol. Repeated withdrawal may be a significant reason for alcohol's harmful effects on the brain. The National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, NIAAA, defines binge drinking as consuming about four drinks for men or three drinks for women in about 2 hours. Compared to students who drink moderately or not at all, frequent drinkers have greater difficulty catching up in brain function as they become adults.

So, in the end, while alcohol may not cause you to lose brain cells, it can profoundly suppress brain cell activity and critical development as well as cause actual permanent changes in the hippocampus and frontal lobes.

No brain, no gain. Just sayin.'



**wildfact**

95% of underage UA students have not received a Minor in Possession in the past year. (2009 Health & Wellness Survey, N=1,720)

**Got a question about alcohol?**

Email it to [redcup@email.arizona.edu](mailto:redcup@email.arizona.edu) and have a chance to win a \$100 Best Buy gift card during the Spring 2010 semester.



The Red Cup Q&A is written by Lynn Reyes, LCSW, LSAC, David Salafsky, MPH, Lee Ann Hamilton, MA, CHES, and Spencer Gorin, RN, in the Health Promotion and Preventive Services (HPPS) department of the UA Campus Health Service.