

the **RED CUP**

Q&A



separating alcohol fact from fiction
EVERY TUESDAY IN THE DAILY WILDCAT

Q How do you calculate a safe amount of alcohol to drink for your age and weight?

A. The quick answer is to limit yourself to one standard drink an hour (if you are female) or two standard drinks an hour (if you are male). A standard drink is 12 ounces of beer (at 4% alcohol), 4 ounces of wine (12% alcohol), or 1 ounce of liquor (40% alcohol). Most “social” drinkers who enjoy alcohol in moderation have a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of .05 or less.

Age doesn't have a large effect on your BAC, but four factors do influence it: weight, sex, time, and number of standard drinks. You can't change your weight and sex while drinking, but you can control how fast you drink and how strong your drinks are. Women often reach higher BACs than their male drinking partners because women's bodies break down alcohol more slowly than men's. Most women have lower levels of the liver enzyme alcohol dehydrogenase (ADH), that metabolizes alcohol. On average, women have about 30% less ADH than men.

A simple way to be a safer drinker is to learn how much each standard drink raises your BAC. Every drink consumed by a 120 pound woman will raise her BAC about .037. That means that two standard drinks in one hour ($2 \times .037$) puts her at .074, which is over the .05 level. A 160 pound woman raises her BAC .028 with each drink. Two drinks in an hour ($2 \times .028$) will put her BAC at .056.

Doing the math for a guy? Each drink consumed by a 140 pound man will raise his BAC .026. At his weight, two standard drinks in one hour ($2 \times .026$) puts him at .052 (which is close to that “safer, social drinker” level). More weight helps. A 180 pound man raises his BAC just .02 with each drink. Two drinks in an hour ($2 \times .020$) will put his BAC at 0.04.

For some people, no amount of alcohol is safe to drink. Examples include pregnant women, people in recovery from alcohol addiction, and those with specific health problems or on certain medications.



wildfact

Drinking water before, during, and after drinking alcohol can moderate your BAC and reduce the chances of a hangover.



Got a question about alcohol?

Email it to redcup@email.arizona.edu



www.health.arizona.edu

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