

the RED CUP Q&A



separating alcohol fact from fiction
EVERY TUESDAY IN THE DAILY WILDCAT

Q Is it true that alcoholism is hereditary? My biological father abused alcohol and I worry that I might, too, someday.

A. Research indicates that children of alcohol-dependent parents have a higher risk of developing an alcohol problem than those without. Alcohol dependence is characterized by tolerance, withdrawal effects, the inability to stop drinking, and continued drinking, despite serious psychological or physiological problems. Below are several factors to consider:

Heredity – Biology certainly plays a role in alcohol dependence and some studies say that the risk may be as high as 50% in the children of alcohol-dependent parents. Sons of dependent fathers seem to be at even greater risk than daughters. Heritable personality traits are also likely to influence risk of dependence. Some of these characteristics include thrill-seeking tendencies, anti-social behavior, anxiety, and depression. Even so, there are more factors at play than your DNA.

Personal Habits – Children raised in a home with excessive and frequent drinking learn that alcohol is a part of daily life. If drinking is established as a normative behavior, children can pick up their parents' habit without even thinking that they have a choice about alcohol.

Environmental Influence – Growing up in an alcohol-dependent environment can have negative repercussions, especially for children. Unhappiness, lack of attention, and unpredictable (or even violent) behavior of parents can lead to poor coping skills in children. This can fuel the flames of alcohol problems later in life.

"Risk is not destiny," according to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. Although you inherited many of your parents' personality traits, alcoholism doesn't have to be one of them. If you want to talk with an experienced professional about your family history or your drinking, call Counseling and Psych Services at (520) 621-3334.



wildfact

The movie *Revenge of the Nerds* was filmed at Cochise Hall on the UA campus in 1984. (www.125.arizona.edu/funfacts)



Got a question about alcohol?

Email it to redcup@email.arizona.edu



www.health.arizona.edu

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.