the RED CUP Q&A

separating alcohol fact from fiction

EVERY TUESDAY IN THE DAILY WILDCAT

Q What should I do when a friend passes out?

A. Passing out from being super-tired (no alcohol involved) is normal. But when someone "passes out" (loses consciousness) from drinking alcohol it can be serious. It's called alcohol poisoning and it happens when someone drinks too much, too fast. It's a severe physical reaction to heavy alcohol consumption and it can be life-threatening.

There is no set rule about how many drinks a person can consume before alcohol poisoning sets in. Alcohol is a depressant drug and becomes a "poison" when it sedates the brain areas that control involuntary actions such as breathing, heartbeat, and the gag reflex that prevents choking. Enough alcohol will eventually bring these vital functions to a halt. Alcohol poisoning deaths can occur due to hypoglycemia (too little blood sugar), seizures, hypothermia (low body temperature), choking on one's own vomit, and/or slowed breathing that becomes irregular and finally stops. Recognizing symptoms of alcohol poisoning and taking action to help a friend may be the difference between life and death.

Symptoms to look for:

- Difficulty standing or walking
- Unconscious or semi-conscious
- Slow breathing – 8 breaths or less per minute
- Cold, clammy, pale, or bluish skin
- Vomiting without waking up
- No response to pain stimulus, such as a pinch

Action Steps:

- Do not leave the person alone and let them "sleep it off".
- Carefully turn the person on their side (not on their back or stomach); with knees slightly bent and their arm under their head to help prevent choking if they vomit.
- Watch the person's breathing. If it stops, start CPR.
- If in doubt about your friend's safety, get help – call 911. Prompt action may save their life.

The typical human liver can process about one standard drink/hour: a 12 oz. beer, a 5 oz. glass of wine, or a 1.5 oz. shot of liquor. Only time, or medical intervention, will lower someone's blood alcohol concentration.

ARIZONA

wildfact **Drinking lowers (not raises) body temperature. There is an illusion of increased heat because alcohol dilates the capillaries, causing them to fill with more warm blood.**

Got a question about alcohol?

Email it to **redcup@email.arizona.edu**

CAMPUS HEALTH SERVICE
www.health.arizona.edu

The Red Cup Q&A is written by Lynn Reyes, LCSW, LISAC, 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.