

the

RED CUP Q&A



separating alcohol fact from fiction
EVERY TUESDAY IN THE DAILY WILDCAT

Q Does alcohol affect your sperm count?

A. It is well documented that alcohol over-consumption has the potential to decrease both sexual performance as well as your sperm count.

Healthy production of sperm requires normal functioning of the hypothalamus and pituitary glands (to trigger hormones necessary for sperm production) as well as the testes. Once sperm are manufactured in the testicles, tubes transport them as they mix with seminal fluids and are then ejaculated out of the penis. Any problems affecting this production system can result in abnormal sperm shape, amount, and motility.

Physiological factors such as varicocele, infection, sperm-attacking antibodies (sounds like a really bad sci-fi/porn movie), tumors, undescended testicle, and chromosomal defects can also impair sperm production.

Environmental factors that may affect sperm count include exposure to industrial chemicals like benzenes or pesticides, heavy metals (though not heavy metal bands), radiation, x-rays, frequent use of hot tubs, tight clothing, and prolonged bicycling.

Occupational risk factors like increased stress or long-term exposure to computer or video displays may have an effect as well. Sperm can also be affected by illegal use of steroids, cocaine and marijuana, smoking, alcohol, and other drug use.

Experts at the Bridge Fertility Center maintain that drinking moderately is safe. However, they also agree that all alcohol consumption is likely to impact male fertility to some degree. Alcohol reduces sperm count and quality by preventing zinc from being absorbed by the body. Lower amounts of zinc are associated with problems in the sperm's outer layer and tail. Abnormal sperm are less likely to fertilize an egg and more likely to create a non-viable embryo. Regular heavy drinking may also damage the tubes that carry semen.

Giving up alcohol completely for three to six months can, on its own, be sufficient to restore fertility. Oh yeah, just in case you were thinking otherwise, using alcohol to lower your sperm count is NOT a viable birth control method.

In closing, Shakespeare wrote of alcohol that "it provokes the desire, but it takes away the performance."



wildfact It takes sperm cells three months to mature.



Got a question
about alcohol?

Email it to redcup@email.arizona.edu



www.health.arizona.edu

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