

the

RED CUP

Q&A



separating alcohol fact from fiction
EVERY TUESDAY IN THE DAILY WILDCAT

Q Can cops tell that you are drunk by looking in your eyes?

A. Oh, yeah! People have many presumptive signs of alcohol intoxication that police look for such as the smell of alcohol on someone's breath or skin, being unusually passive or aggressive and/or having glazed or bloodshot eyes.

However, there is an even more definitive field sobriety test that police can administer that focuses on your eyes. This test is called Horizontal Gaze Nystagmus (HGN). HGN is one of three standardized field sobriety tests developed by the National Highway Traffic and Safety Administration to identify drunk drivers.

Nystagmus is a technical term for an involuntary jerking of the eyeball. And, a *horizontal* gaze nystagmus is a lateral jerking movement when a person looks towards the side. It occurs when there is an irregularity in the inner ear or because of a problem affecting motor control of the eye. Alcohol, inhalants and PCP are drugs that affect the brain's ability to control eye muscles. The higher the alcohol content in the blood, the greater the nystagmus is.

Research has shown that this test is very reliable in detecting blood alcohol content (BAC) levels of .10% or higher. However, HGN can also be used to detect lower BAC levels – as low as .05%. When an officer asks you to “follow their finger or a pen” as they move it from one side to the other of your face, they are looking for HGN. You can still be given a citation without having to blow a .08% – just by failing field sobriety tests alone.

In conclusion, while it has been said that the eyes are the “gateway to the soul” they can also be the gateway to being busted.



wildfact

The average person blinks 12 times/minute. At 0.3 seconds/blink, that comes out to 30 minutes/day.



Got a question
about alcohol?

Email it to redcup@email.arizona.edu



www.health.arizona.edu

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