

the RED CUP Q&A

separating alcohol fact from fiction

wildfact

“Blacking out” is what happens when you drink, are awake and responsive, but the next day (or maybe forever) you cannot remember what you did.

My friend got drunk and vomited a lot. I was worried about her and kept her at my apartment to watch her. What would I have done if she passed out?

You did the right thing to keep a close eye on your friend. “Passing out” might describe a person who is super-tired and falls asleep (no alcohol involved). It might be someone who faints. But when someone “passes out” while drinking alcohol (loses consciousness and is completely unresponsive) it can be serious. It might be alcohol poisoning which 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 can bring these vital functions to a halt. Too much alcohol can stop a friend’s breathing. 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 them 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 their breathing rate. If it stops, start CPR.
- If in doubt about your friend’s safety, get help – call 911. It’s the right thing to do. Prompt action may save their life.

Got a question about alcohol? Email it to redcup@email.arizona.edu



www.health.arizona.edu



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