

the RED CUP Q&A

separating alcohol fact from fiction

wildfact

The average human body is covered with about 20 square feet (two square meters) of skin.

Can alcohol make you look older faster?

Unfortunately, yes. Lots of things contribute to looking older and alcohol is on the list. And not in a good way. Most people are familiar with the negative effects over-use of alcohol can bring to our internal organs but may not be aware of how it looks on the outside (besides the beer belly, of course).

Look no further than the face. How does that work? Alcohol is notoriously dehydrating – it increases the rate at which the body excretes water and limits the absorption of nutrients vital for healthy skin. The dehydrating factor causes your kidneys to pump out more water which is why you're urinating more when drinking. One way to minimize this effect is to drink plenty of water before, during and after drinking alcohol. Actually, it's a good idea to drink water, period. Because the drier your skin gets, the more wrinkles you get. Also, alcohol is a vasodilator, meaning it causes the small blood vessels in the face to widen,

producing flushed, coarse skin and eventually tiny broken veins. And we haven't even gotten to the bloating or the bloodshot eyes look (that happens when alcohol inflames and enlarges the small blood vessels on the surface of your eyes).

Don't forget the sugary alcohol drinks some of us like. As you may already know, our bodies convert sugar to glucose which attaches to skin proteins. What does that have to do with looking older? Well, the more sugar we consume, the more our body's collagen and elastin, which help maintain our skin's firmness and elasticity, get compromised. Bottom line: too much sugar eventually leads to sagging, wrinkled skin.

Of course, these effects are a process and don't mean an over-the-top Friday night will result in extra wrinkles Saturday morning. With moderation of alcohol, sun, diet and no smoking, your skin will look better longer.

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



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