

# the RED CUP Q&A

separating alcohol fact from fiction

wildfact

March 28 - April 1 is UA Mental Health Awareness Week. Check it out at [Facebook.com/UA Active Minds](https://www.facebook.com/UAActiveMinds)

## Does alcohol cause headaches? Are certain kinds more likely to cause migraines?

For some people, yes, alcohol can trigger headaches. Let's focus on four ways that alcohol can cause headaches, including migraines.

**Dehydration.** It is well-documented that drinking alcohol can cause headaches due to the effects of dehydration on body tissues, including the brain. Alcohol is a diuretic, and it causes the kidneys to excrete water. When the body doesn't have enough fluid in the tissues and circulatory system, the end result can be muscle cramps, headache, and more. Higher levels of dehydration may alter mood, decrease your mental alertness and concentration, and lower your ability to perform both physically and cognitively.

**Vasodilation.** Consuming alcohol causes blood vessels to dilate, or expand, and this alone can cause a headache.

**Tyramine.** Migraines can be caused by many different things, including hormone changes (particularly in women), foods (nuts, aged meats and cheeses, and fermented, salted, smoked, or pickled products), and alcoholic beverages. The most common culprit in alcohol-induced migraines is the substance tyramine which results from the breakdown of

the amino acid, tyrosine. Higher levels of tyramine can be found in chianti, red wines, sherry, vermouth, beer, and ales. Some people are very sensitive to tyramine and eventually learn which alcoholic beverages (and foods) trigger headaches.

**Congeners.** Congeners are compounds that form in beverages during the fermentation process. Their presence has been linked with more severe hangover symptoms, including headaches. Generally speaking, dark liquors like bourbon, whiskey, and wine have more congeners than clear liquors such as rum, vodka, gin, etc.

**How to avoid alcohol-induced headaches?** Drink extra water when you imbibe spirits. If you tend to have migraines, avoid the types of alcohol that trigger your headaches. Drink moderately: no more than one drink an hour for women; no more than two drinks an hour for men. When you keep your blood alcohol concentration (BAC) low, you can enjoy the positive effects (a little buzz, fun times, a night to remember, socializing) without the drawbacks (headaches, vomiting, regretted behavior, blacking out, hangovers, etc.).

Got a question about alcohol? Email it to [redcup@email.arizona.edu](mailto:redcup@email.arizona.edu)



[www.health.arizona.edu](http://www.health.arizona.edu)



**CAMPUS HEALTH**

The Red Cup Q&A is written by Lynn Reyes, LCSW, LISAC, David Salafsky, MPH, Lee Ann Hamilton, MA, CHES, Spencer Gorin, RN, and Christiana Clauson, MPH, in the Health Promotion and Preventive Services (HPPS) department of the UA Campus Health Service.