

the RED CUP Q&A



separating alcohol fact from fiction
EVERY TUESDAY IN THE DAILY WILDCAT

Q What is dangerous about mixing caffeine with alcohol?

A. Consuming a stimulant (caffeine) with a depressant (alcohol) can mask the effects of the alcohol, causing a person to feel less intoxicated than they actually are. This can lead to dangerous behaviors and negative health outcomes like sexual risk-taking, sexual assault, driving under the influence, fights, and injuries. Some people falsely assume that combining caffeine and alcohol will “cancel out” each substance’s effects.

Perhaps you have seen the recent media reports about the 12% alcohol content malt beverage, Four Loko, sometimes called “blackout in a can.” Last month, nine female Central Washington University students were hospitalized with extremely high blood alcohol levels (one nearly fatal) after drinking Four Loko at a party. What’s different about these cheap, sweet, caffeinated, colorful large cans of brew? One 23.5 oz. can of Four Loko has almost six times the amount of alcohol in a 12 oz. can of Keystone Light.

Drinks like Four Loko can be especially dangerous for ladies. A woman who weighs 120 pounds could have a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of 0.217 (almost 3 times the legal limit of 0.08) after drinking only one can of Four Loko. Many drinkers would blackout at that level. Just two cans could cause unconsciousness, coma, or death in some drinkers.

Caffeine does nothing to curb alcohol’s depressant effects on the central nervous system or lower a person’s BAC. Most high energy alcoholic concoctions contain large amounts of caffeine and guarana (another stimulant) which can lead to jitteriness, headache, fast heartbeat, and serious health issues.

A study done with Florida college students found that students who consumed energy drinks with alcohol were three times more likely to leave a bar highly intoxicated than those who drank non-caffeinated alcoholic beverages. To have a safer and more memorable time when partying, choose lower alcohol beverages without caffeine, set a drink limit, and stick to it.

Reference from the Journal of Addictive Behaviors, Volume 35, Issue 4, April 2010, Pages 325-330.



wildfact

Guarana, which contains caffeine, is made from the beans of a South American tree.



Got a question about alcohol?

Email it to redcup@email.arizona.edu



www.health.arizona.edu

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