

the **RED CUP**

Q&A



separating alcohol fact from fiction
EVERY TUESDAY IN THE DAILY WILDCAT

Q Is alcohol considered a drug?

A. Yes, alcohol falls in the category of a central nervous system (CNS) depressant. It interferes with the activity of various brain centers and neurochemical systems, sometimes with seeming paradoxical results. At lower doses it leads to reduced inhibitions and very high doses can suppress CNS function to the point of causing respiratory arrest and death.

What makes alcohol a drug? It's all about chemistry; the brain contains many types of chemical messengers (neurotransmitters) that act as communication agents between different brain cells. These chemical messengers are molecular substances that can affect mood, appetite, anxiety, sleep, heart rate, temperature, aggression, fear, and many other psychological and physical states. College students drink to socialize and feel that alcohol helps by lowering inhibitions and "making" them more social (talkative, outgoing, fun).* However, if the brain becomes dependent upon the substance to release the good neurotransmitters, the drinker can become addicted.

So why do some people say alcohol is not a drug? Perhaps, because it's legal if you're 21; perhaps, because alcohol is socially and culturally acceptable as opposed to illegal drugs. Confusion is exacerbated by health literature and professionals referring to substances as "alcohol and other drugs." Alcohol has been called one of the world's most devastating drugs in terms of health and social consequences (second only to nicotine).

Drugs are of course a complicated topic to talk about, for many reasons – almost any drug can be fatal if used improperly, and psychological and social effects are more difficult to quantify than physical harms.

*Balanced Placebo Design research from A. Marlatt at the University of Washington demonstrated that the desired effects from alcohol consumption were not actually due to the alcohol itself, but rather the belief, or expectation, that the beverage contained alcohol.



wildfact

**Average drinks per hour the last time
UA students drank (median) = 1.**

(2011 Health & Wellness Survey, N=2,479)



**Got a question
about alcohol?**

Email it to redcup@email.arizona.edu



www.health.arizona.edu

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