

the RED CUP Q&A



separating alcohol fact from fiction
EVERY TUESDAY IN THE DAILY WILDCAT

Q When you pass out do you still have REM sleep?

A. An unfortunate effect of alcohol is the disruption of sleep patterns. This disruption can lead to restless sleep and other sleep problems, which can cause fatigue, memory, cognition and motor deficits the following day.

Alcohol also impacts our dreams. Even at low amounts, alcohol suppresses REM (“rapid eye movement”) sleep, which is the stage of the sleep cycle where the majority of dreaming occurs. When the amount of alcohol is low, REM sleep is restrained only in the first half of the night. At larger amounts, REM sleep is suppressed throughout the night. If you skip your REM dream cycle, how will you enjoy battling zombie crab-monsters or riding your dragon naked through your old high school auditorium which now somehow resembles an apocalyptic Disneyland?

All kidding aside, REM sleep is very important. The benefits include enabling our minds to process emotions, memories, and stress much more effectively. REM sleep helps our brain learn and develop new skills. Researchers postulate that dreams are the brain’s way of handling information we get during each day.

Beyond the disruption of REM sleep, there are serious dangers of drinking until you pass out. At a BAC level of .25 to .3, average drinkers become sedated, have trouble standing, perceiving what is going on, and staying awake. As the possibility of alcohol poisoning increases, drinkers may choke on their vomit. Most drinkers will lose consciousness around .4 BAC and risk going into a coma.

In the end, our dreams are meaningful, entertaining, and vitally important to our health – providing peeks into our subconscious, possibly correcting imbalances in our psyche, and finding creative solutions to problems we are up against in life, be they feeling overwhelmed by exams or battling zombie crab-monsters.

“If you want sweet dreams, you’ve got to live a sweet life.” ~ Barbara Kingsolver, *Animal Dreams*



wildfact

Within 10 minutes of awakening you forget 90% of your dreams.



Got a question about alcohol?

Email it to redcup@email.arizona.edu



www.health.arizona.edu

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