

the

RED CUP Q&A



separating alcohol fact from fiction
EVERY TUESDAY IN THE DAILY WILDCAT

Q How quickly does alcohol affect you?

A. The short answer is: faster than you may think, with immediate effects being felt in as little as 10 minutes. While the feelings of alcohol consumption kick in quickly, the rate at which alcohol is eliminated/metabolized by the body is a slow process. On average, the liver can only process about one standard drink per hour.



1 DRINK =
12 oz. beer
4-5 oz. wine
1 oz. liquor

First and foremost, alcohol is absorbed into the body. The molecular properties of ethanol allow it to easily pass through membranes and quickly reach all cells and tissues within the body. Most of it (~80%) gets in the bloodstream by passing through the walls of the small intestine. The other 20% gets absorbed through the lining of the stomach. The absorption process takes a little longer if your stomach is “busy” digesting food, which is why you feel alcohol’s effects faster if you drink on an empty stomach. Chow down a burrito from Highland Market beforehand, and the alcohol still charts the same course, but it takes a little longer to reach your bloodstream, and you’ll likely have a more sustained, enjoyable “buzz” as a result.

That’s the physical side of alcohol, but there’s more to the story. Ever notice how after a busy day, that first taste of beer when you are out with friends is instantly relaxing? Well, that has everything to do with our *expectations* around alcohol. Cracking open a can is enough to signal to our brain that it’s time to chill, time to have some fun, time to be a little more social and outgoing. So, in a way, alcohol’s effects can even be felt before the very first sip.



wildfact

77% of UA students drink only 22% of the total alcohol consumed. Or in other words, 23% of UA students drink 78% of the alcohol.
(2013 Health & Wellness Survey, n=3,055)



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.