

the RED CUP Q&A

separating alcohol fact from fiction

wildfact

A blackout usually occurs when a person's BAC is approximately 0.20% or higher.

What is a blackout and why don't I remember things?

A "blackout" is a period of memory loss for events that transpired while drinking alcohol. This occurs because alcohol suppresses the activity of memory receptors in your brain. With low doses of alcohol, these receptors slow down, and with higher doses, they shut down almost completely. Basically, memory receptors in your brain get blocked with excessive alcohol intake. It's not that you are forgetting what happened; you are actually not even forming the memory. There are two different categories of blackouts. One occurs when your memory is spotty, and you may be able to remember "bits and pieces" of your night out, but not all of it. The other is when you cannot remember any of your drinking episode.

Why is this a problem? Blackouts usually occur when you engage in heavy drinking within a short period of time, which is dangerous.

During a blackout you are not in control of what you are doing, and you are not able to give consent to things you wouldn't do if sober. You don't even realize you are blacked out until you start to sober up, usually the next morning. Others don't know you are blacked out either because you are awake during the episode. Although you may appear intoxicated, you are still functioning in that you remember who you are, your friend's names, where you live, etc.

How to Avoid a Blackout

Determine in advance how many drinks you will have. Pace yourself. Don't drink a lot of alcohol in a short period of time. Keep track of what you drink. This means no pulls from the bottle; instead drink beer or wine, or make your own mixed drink. Eat before you go out. Drink water before, during and after drinking alcohol to avoid blackouts and hangovers.

Got a question about alcohol? Email it to redcup@email.arizona.edu



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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 Castillo, MPH, in the Health Promotion and Preventive Services (HPPS) department of the UA Campus Health Service.