

the RED CUP Q&A

separating alcohol fact from fiction

What's the healthiest way to drink?

Mixed messaging around alcohol can make it hard to know if there is a healthy way to drink. Health is personal and complex and includes habits, environment, and genetics. How much you drink now can affect your immediate health by impacting your sleep, stress, and

the number of accidents you have. Few people realize what impact even moderate drinking can have on their long-term health.

If you want to be healthy, it's a good idea to decide what kind of drinker you want to be ahead of time. The following chart can help:

TYPE OF DRINKER	DESCRIPTION	HEALTH BENEFITS	HEALTH RISKS
Non-drinker (abstainer)	0-1 drink annually	No risk of adverse effects.	No risks
Light drinker	1-3 drinks weekly or less. BAC remains below .05. 3 days or more weekly where no drinking takes place.	Increase in HDL.* Lowered risks of gall/kidney stones and rheumatoid arthritis. Little to no impact on sleep. May lower diabetes risk.	May increase risk of breast cancer in women.
Moderate drinker	1 drink or more daily. BAC stays under .05. Drinking is part of a regular routine or habit. May have some tolerance developed.	Increase in HDL.* Lowered risks of gall/kidney stones and rheumatoid arthritis.	Increased weight. Significant increase in cancer risks for women. Increase in alcohol related accidents outweigh heart-related benefits for men under 30.
Heavy drinker	Frequently becomes intoxicated (BAC .08+). Has some tolerance to alcohol. May not be able to stop drinking once started. Hangovers, black-outs, and other consequences seen as commonplace.	Negligible benefit.	Higher links to obesity and loss of muscle mass. Cancers, dementia, brain damage, heart damage, impotence, nerve damage. Increased depression and violence. Risk of dependence is high.
Binge drinker	May not drink except for "special occasions" which could be as few as 1 time a year but when they do, BAC tends to go above .08.	There are no recognized health benefits with this type of drinking.	Any "benefit" (of light drinking) can be lost with one heavy-drinking episode. Increased alcohol related accidents, STI's, unwanted pregnancies, poisonings, and death.

*high-density lipoproteins

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



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