

SEXtalk)))

Answers to Your Questions about Sex and Relationships

Have a ??? Email sextalk@u.arizona.edu

factoid

64% of UA students had 4 or fewer drinks the last time they drank (Wellness 2001, n=1220)

Q. Besides making you lose judgement, what other effects does alcohol have on the brain and how is it related to sexual relationships?

A. Alcohol is commonly portrayed as an aphrodisiac. And at a certain level, this has some truth. In low doses (1-3 drinks per occasion depending on weight and gender) alcohol lowers inhibitions such as fear, guilt or shyness that may block sexual expression. It may also induce feelings of sexual arousal and allow one to feel more comfortable about touching and being touched.

On the other hand, if alcohol is consumed in higher quantities, it can actually impair sexual functioning. Research shows that as intoxication level increases, individuals experience reduced sexual arousal, decreased pleasurable and intensity of orgasm, increased difficulty in attaining orgasm, impaired erection ability (men) and decreased vaginal lubrication (women). It also diminishes judgement, increasing the likelihood of engaging in unprotected and/or unintended or unwanted sex.

Alcohol is a depressant that affects the entire central nervous system. Other effects that alcohol has on the brain (and body) include: decreased ability to solve problems and think rationally, loss of coordination and other psychomotor skills, and memory impairment. In large doses, alcohol can lead to passing out, blacking out, respiratory failure, coma and death.

If you choose to drink alcohol, keeping your Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) at or below .05 is a good rule of thumb. At this level, the positive effects of alcohol are predominant and the associated risk level is minimal (although for some individuals, any amount of alcohol is unsafe). If you are unsure about how to calculate your BAC, visit < <http://health.discovery.com> > and type "blood alcohol content" in the search box, then click on "Blood Alcohol Content -- calculator, tool."

References: Lynn Reyes, MSW, Campus Health Service; [Our Sexuality](#) (Crooks & Baur, 1996).

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