

BORG Around and Find Out... What You Really Need to Know About BORGs



“Blackout Rage Gallons”, or BORGs, are trending on college campuses all around the country. Whether it’s going to a concert or a party, BORGs seem to be the center of attention. They have even become a Tik Tok trend. We’re sure you’ve seen them – videos of people creating BORGs and giving them creative names. (“Ruth Bader Ginsborg”, anybody?) Maybe you’ve seen them here around campus. And maybe, as you’re gearing up for spring, you’re thinking about making one yourself. They don’t seem too bad from what you’ve heard, right? Before you make that call, make sure you have the full story, know the risks, and know how to keep yourself safe.

What Are BORGs?

BORGs are made by pouring out some of the liquid from a gallon jug and then pouring in liquor – often as much as a fifth (750 ml) of vodka, whiskey, or rum—and some kind of flavoring, sometimes with electrolytes. You may have heard that BORGs are essentially a hack to drink a bunch, have a wild night, and not feel terrible about it the next day. You might have even heard that they are safer because the alcohol is mixed with water and electrolytes, and you can keep them closed with a cap. Unfortunately, that isn’t the case.

Did you know?

A fifth of 80-proof liquor/40% ABV, which is what most Tik Tok recipes encourage you to add, is equal to 16 shots. No matter what else you mix into the jug or how much you try to water it down, you’re still drinking 16 shots. Diluting the alcohol with some sort of juice or flavoring may help mask the taste of the alcohol, but it doesn’t change how much you’re drinking, so it can be easy to think you’re not drinking as much alcohol as you really are. Not tasting the alcohol because of the juice or other flavoring can also make you drink it faster because you don’t realize how strong the BORG is. Ultimately, BORGs make it easy to drink too much alcohol without even realizing it.

Terms You Should Know

There can be some serious risks associated with drinking too much. But before we jump into that, let’s review some important definitions.

- Drinking in Moderation: 1 drink or less a day for females; 2 drinks or less a day for males

- Lower-Risk Drinking: no more than 3 drinks for a female or 4 drinks for a male on an occasion
- High-Risk (binge) Drinking: 4 or more drinks for a female or 5 or more drinks for a male on an occasion
- Problematic Drinking: 8 or more drinks for a female or 10 or more drinks for a male on an occasion
- Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) – A measure of the amount of alcohol in your bloodstream. Factors affecting your BAC include your sex assigned at birth, weight, how much you drank and how quickly you drank it.

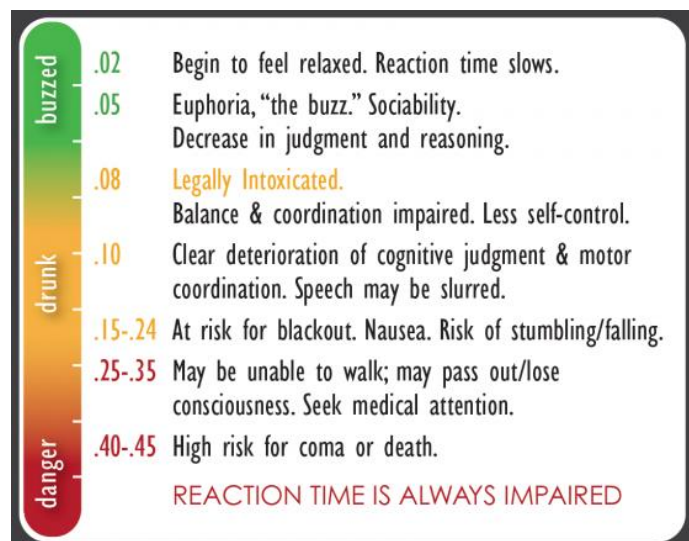
* The terms “male” and “female” are used due to the way alcohol affects the sexes differently on a biological basis. Research is too limited to provide specific guidance for transgender and intersex individuals at this time.

Risks of BORGs

Now that we have those definitions locked in, let’s talk about some risks associated with drinking. There is no risk-free level of alcohol consumption, but the more you drink and the faster you drink, the more likely you are to experience negative effects as your BAC increases. If your BAC gets too high, you risk injury, alcohol overdose**, or death. As we mentioned before, many BORG recipes encourage you to add the equivalent of 16 shots worth of liquor to your BORG. For most people, 16 shots will raise your BAC to dangerous or even deadly levels (.20 and higher) even if consumed over a full day. The risk increases if you drink it over a shorter period. Curious how one BORG with the equivalent of 16 shots would affect your own BAC? Try out our [BAC estimator](#), and check out the progressive effects chart below.

BORGs have also been promoted as “safer” because you can keep them just for yourself and closed with a cap to prevent anyone from putting something else in your drink. While that may be true, it requires you to never share your BORG, leave it unattended at any time, and essentially carry the large container with you at all times. How realistic does that sound if the intent is to keep a gallon-sized BORG with you for the entire day?

**What is an alcohol overdose? An alcohol overdose happens when a person has so much alcohol in their bloodstream that the areas of the brain that control basic life support functions begin to shut down. Signs of an alcohol overdose may



include vomiting while unconscious, slowed or irregular breathing, cold and sweaty/clammy skin, loss of gag reflex, mental confusion, stupor and more. If you see someone who has any one of these symptoms, call 911 or get medical assistance immediately. If treatment is not received soon enough, it can put that person at risk of a coma or death.

Harm Reduction Tips

As a reminder, there is no risk-free level of drinking, but if you choose to use a BORG, there are a few things you can do to reduce risk:

1. Make your own BORG with less alcohol: If you do choose to use a BORG, making your own gives you control over how much alcohol you add. Now that you know the risks of adding a full fifth, you can choose to add LESS alcohol. No one will know if you only put one or two shots or even no alcohol in your BORG. Keep in mind the [lower-risk drinking guidelines](#) and use the [BAC estimator](#) to make an informed decision.
2. Use a smaller container: Just because the name implies using a gallon jug doesn't mean you can't go with something more manageable like a half-gallon or liter-sized bottle of water. This allows you to easily put less alcohol into the container from the start and still have a large amount of water. It's also less cumbersome and easier to keep with you until you're done.
3. Pace yourself and set a lower limit: A general rule of thumb is to pace drinks to one per hour and not consume more than the lower-risk limits of 3 or 4 drinks for females and males* respectively. Remember that even spacing out large quantities of alcohol often associated with BORGs will raise a person's BAC to dangerous levels.
4. Drink water before, during, and after: Whether you are taking part in a BORG for the day or any other alcoholic beverages, be sure to consume regular water or other nonalcoholic beverages to remain hydrated. This isn't going to "kill your buzz," but it will reduce the risk of becoming dehydrated, hungover, or worse.
5. Know the levels of impairment, signs of intoxication, and how to help: Whether you or your friends have chosen to drink BORGs, knowing the [signs and symptoms associated with alcohol overdose](#) can help indicate when it is time to stop drinking or help a friend who has consumed too much alcohol. To prevent this from happening in the first place, set lower limits, pace yourself, drink plenty of water, and stick close to your trusted friends at any event where alcohol is present. If at any time there is concern that somebody is suffering from an alcohol overdose, call for help so that you are covered under the [Amnesty through Responsible Action policy](#).

Resources

BAC Estimator: Blood alcohol concentration (BAC) is a measure of alcohol in the bloodstream. If you choose to drink, we recommend gradually reaching a BAC of no more than .06%. Staying within this range helps to reduce the chance of experiencing

negative outcomes associated with alcohol consumption. A BAC estimator can help you approximate how many standard drinks it takes to reach and maintain a BAC of .06%.

AOD Website: The Alcohol and Other Drug Resources website provides Northwestern students, parents, faculty, staff, and neighbors with a centralized hub for information, policies, programs, and services related to alcohol and other drugs. It represents the work of numerous campus partners who share the goal of supporting students in making responsible decisions about alcohol and other drugs, including low-risk use and non-use, to keep the Northwestern community safer and healthier.

BASICS, or Brief Alcohol Screening and Intervention for College Students, is designed for college students who drink/use drugs and are at risk for or have experienced negative consequences as a result of their use (e.g., injuries, blackouts, fights, physical or sexual assault, poor academic performance, legal problems). The goal of BASICS is to reduce the negative consequences of substance use by helping students make better substance use decisions.

eCheckUp To Go: The Alcohol eCheckUp To Go and the Cannabis eCheckUp To Go are interactive web surveys that allow students to enter information about their drinking or drug use patterns and receive personalized feedback about their use. The assessments take about 15 minutes to complete and require no face-to-face time with a counselor or health care professional.

Red Watch Band bystander intervention training: Red Watch Band provides Northwestern students with the knowledge and skills necessary to identify and intervene in an alcohol-related medical emergency. Participants learn how alcohol affects our physiology and behavior, the signs and symptoms of alcohol poisoning, how to prevent and/or respond to an alcohol emergency, and the truth behind common alcohol-related myths. Register here to attend a training this spring. Dates will continue to be added throughout the quarter.