

University Health Center Health Education Program



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Happy Hour?

Mixing alcohol with other drugs makes for dangerous interactions

by Matt Nelson

It seems, these days, that articles concerning campus health often deal predominantly with issues surrounding alcohol and other drugs. Alcohol has become a major focus of college campuses nationwide due, greatly, to the effects of student intoxication including accidents, assaults, and even death. The introduction of "date-rape" drugs and their easy mixture with alcohol has led the government to publish awareness materials, alert law enforcement, social groups, and campus health centers to the potential use of such substances for the purposes of sexual assault. Furthermore, many students who choose not to drink still use at least one drug occasionally for recreation. While much emphasis has been placed on these aspects of alcohol and other drug use, the area of alcohol and combined drug interactions has been consistently overlooked.

Every campus in the nation has a large number of students taking prescription and over-the-counter pharmaceuticals. Alcohol interferes with the intended action of almost every class of prescription and over-the-counter drug available. Of the 100 most prescribed drugs, at least 50% have been shown to react adversely with alcohol. This statistic does not even include more common and less controlled over-the-counter medications. Exemplifying the importance of drug-alcohol interactions, a Peer Health Educator tells this story...

"A friend of mine had been given a pain medication prescription for a knee injury. Later in the day, we decided to go to a party and have a few drinks. Unfortunately, my friend failed to remember that she had taken the painkillers. We ended up taking her to the hospital because she went into convulsions at the party." Obviously, the friend had not paid attention to the labeling on the medication or had not been specifically told not to mix the medication with alcohol. In this case, the student was extremely lucky-the fact that her friends

were around and sought medical attention for her immediately likely saved her life. This is not always the case.

Instances such as this exemplify the most dangerous category of alcohol and other drug interactions. Alcohol's depressant effects are exponentially increased with the addition of other central nervous system



depressants such as painkillers, tranquilizers, and sleep aids. The result is decreased heart rate and blood pressure, reduced coordination, slowed reflexes and increased drowsiness. Outward symptoms, such as convulsions, are less common. More often, the person simply falls asleep or passes out, thereby exhibiting no alarming symptoms, while the combination of drugs and alcohol continue to depress the central nervous system until the heart ceases to beat.

Aside from the misuse of alcohol and prescrip-

tion drugs, the most prevalent adverse drug interactions are usually unintentional, non-fatal and involve over-the-counter (OTC) drugs. Americans use more OTC pharmaceuticals per capita than any other nation.

Dr. Lindquist, a medical practitioner at the University of Oregon Health Center, frequently deals with alcohol and other drug interactions. He has observed that the most common adverse interactions result from taking multiple over-the-counter medications, with the same active ingredient, for a single illness. Some medications, such as the decongestant pseudoephedrine (Sudafed), are stimulants while others, such as antihistamines (Benadryl), are depressants. While less potent than most prescription medications, double-dosing over-the-counter medications can have equally negative consequences. Also prevalent on campus is the use of prescription antibiotics for infections. Alcohol, consumed while on antibiotics, significantly reduces their effectiveness and may also cause nausea and upset stomach.

The interaction of alcohol and other drugs has only begun to receive the attention of universities due to the increased use of date rape drugs. It is nonetheless important for students to be aware that many of the medications they are prescribed or buy over-the-counter can have equally harmful interactions when mixed with each other and/or with alcohol. It is, therefore, our responsibility to research the possible interactions of medications we take. Fortunately, many resources are available to interested students at the University of Oregon Health Center, including: the Peer Health Education office (345-4456), Pharmacy (346-4454), and any of the medical practitioners on staff at the Health Center. Call 346-2770 to make an appointment. After-hours, a call to the Health Center (346-2770) will connect you to a Seattle based "Dial-A-Nurse" service.

AIDS: Twenty Years Later

By Amy Papé

FACT

The life threatening disease, AIDS, continues to spread around the world, infecting 5.3 million people in 2000, approximately 15,000 people per day. (Yet we continue to engage in unprotected high-risk sexual behavior).

FACT

In the United States, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) estimates that 900,000 people are living with HIV and one third of these are unaware that they are infected. (Yet we still believe that we can tell if a person is HIV positive just by their appearance).

FACT

One half of all new HIV infections are among those aged 25 and under. (Yet we hang on to the belief that "it just can't happen to me").

FACT

In 1996 AIDS climbed to the fifth leading cause of death among people aged 25 to 44. (Yet many of us are still willing to risk transmission for convenience).

FACT

The CDC reports that while the number of AIDS cases is declining, the number of people living with HIV infection is growing, which means that each risk behavior carries an increased risk for infection. (Let us not forget that there still is no cure for this disease).

After twenty years, AIDS and HIV are still one step ahead of us. In order to stop HIV, each and every one of us needs to protect ourselves every time we engage in risky behavior, even if we think we know our partners. We all know that abstinence is the only surefire way to prevent infection and can even be

enjoyable. (Check out the other articles in WellNow). But for those of us who still want to engage in sexual contact (oral, anal, and vaginal sex), condoms and dental dams are a must. These handy latex tools prevent the spread of HIV as well as many other sexually transmitted infections and pregnancy. These weapons against infection are a lot less expensive than a lifetime of prescriptions and pain that come with a positive HIV diagnosis. Condoms and dental dams are available free to students at the Health Education Office. Students that are enrolled in the FPEP (Family Planning Expansion Project) program receive a free year's supply of condoms. Call 346-2770 to see if you qualify for FPEP.

The next step in combating HIV is to get tested. If you have been sexually active, no matter how many partners you have had, it is important to get an HIV test. Yes, it can be nerve racking waiting for the results. I remember when I first got tested. The two weeks I waited for my results were the longest of my life. However, now that I know my results I can be honest and open with my partner.

Confidential testing is available at the Health Center for \$12. Appointments can be made by calling 346-2770. The \$12 can be billed to your student account and will show up as miscellaneous lab work. Results are kept in a confidential file within your medical records and can be released to others only upon your written consent. If you test positive, State of Oregon regulations require that the results be sent to the State Health Department. Under this new "names-to-code" reporting system, your name will be linked to your positive result until the health department has completed an HIV case report form and you have been referred for HIV prevention and care services. Once these have been done, a code will be matched to your results and your name will be deleted from the system.

College aged people are the fastest growing group of new HIV infections and without all of us acknowledging the risk and protecting ourselves, we will lose many in our generation. Get protected, get tested, and get informed.

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Enjoy Sensuality

Enjoy eroticism with your partner, with or without going "all the way".

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