

My Favorite Sex Questions

By Shannon McClean

Now that I'm a Peer Health Educator, I find myself staffing information tables on everything from body image to safer sex. As such, I'm amazed at the confusion and dubious advice going around about sexual health. Here are some of my favorite questions that have come up, along with the answers that I researched. My theory is that for every person who asks, there's a bunch of other students who would also like the information.

Q: My friend was telling me that a girl could examine her self like a gynecologist does. Is this true?

A: It's important for us women to be familiar with our genitals on a regular basis so we know what's normal for our body and to take an active role in our reproductive health care. Unlike guys, getting a glimpse of our genitalia can be a bit tricky. If you would like to look at your cervix between annual exams, you can buy a speculum at Planned Parenthood for only \$2. A lot of women have trouble using it at first, so try it with a health care provider or partner to begin with.

Q: I'm 18 and I don't want to go to the gynecologist because it sounds embarrassing and I've heard that it hurts. Do I really need to go?

A: A gynecological exam, including a pap smear, is recommended after sexual activity begins or around age 20, whichever comes first. Your health care provider may recommend a different standard. Pap smears are important to screen for cervical cancer and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). A pelvic exam should never hurt and if something feels uncomfortable you should speak up with your clinician. At the Health Center, the practitioners are eager to educate students about routine procedures and personal health. Asking the medical practitioner to show you your cervix with a mirror can make your experience interesting. You can bring a friend or family member with you to help you feel more comfortable.

Q: My boyfriend has his genitals pierced. Will this make the condom break when we have sex?

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A: Most pierced people haven't experienced an increase in condoms breaking, but cases have been reported. If condoms are your only form of birth control, you might want to stop by the Health Center and pick emergency contraception (EC) ahead of time, just in case the condom does fail. Emergency contraception is most effective when taken within 5 days following unprotected intercourse. The sooner EC is taken, the more effective it is in preventing pregnancy. If you qualify for FPEP it's free, and if not, EC costs around \$12. To see if you qualify for FPEP's free contraception services, call 346-2770.

Q: I just got an e-mail saying that tampons have asbestos. Is this true?

A: This e-mail was just another urban legend. However, most tampons you can buy at a grocery store are made of bleached cotton and contain synthetic chemicals such as rayon. Consider that a woman can go through an average of 10,000 tampons in her lifetime! And while toxic

shock syndrome triggered by tampon use is rare, it is useful to know there are options to bleached tampons. "Instead" is a plastic cup that catches menses and looks like a diaphragm. It can be left inside the vagina up to eight hours and be bought at most grocery stores. At many health food stores you can find non-chlorine bleached tampons. Making your own pads with thick fabric that can be rinsed out and reused, can save a lot of money. For more info on alternatives to bleached tampons, check out www.bloodsisters.org, www.lunapads.com, and www.keeper.com

If you have any questions of your own, come by the Peer Health Education office in the Health Center, by area B, and ask a peer health educator or check out our great library on health topics. If you want expert advice, make an appointment with a nurse practitioner or physician by calling 346-2770.

A glimpse into the drinking patterns of the Ducks



By KyleAnn Mabey

Binge drinking. Until college, most of us had never heard this term. Sure we went through D.A.R.E and various attempts at discouraging drug use, hearing over and over information regarding alcoholism. We saw pamphlets on safe drinking, but still what exactly is high risk drinking? As far as understanding different drinking behaviors that exists among students, we were pretty much left to figure it out on our own. How do we know if we or someone we know is headed for trouble with alcohol? I considered this one of the great unsolved health problems many college students face and so did some careful research. Here is what I found.

Henry Wechsler, director of College Alcohol Studies at the Harvard School of Public Health, defined binge drinking as consuming five or more drinks for males, or four or more for females, in one sitting. One drink consists of a 12 oz. beer, 5 oz. of wine, or one shot of hard liquor. The term binge drinking basically refers to the level of intoxication when physical in-

jury, and other immediate health and social problems begin to kick in. For some of us, four or five drinks seems like a lot of alcohol to consume at once, but for others this may be part of a familiar routine. Regardless of whether you can drink that much at once, you may wonder just how common binge drinking is at UO.

According to the 2002 University of Oregon Health Center Survey, when 405 University students were asked, "In the last two weeks how many times have you consumed five or more drinks in one sitting?" 63% answered "none at all." Since the Health Center survey is a random sample that represents the entire student body, this signifies that most students didn't binge drink in the weeks prior to the survey. For the guys, 57% hadn't drunk enough to be considered binge drinking and for the gals, 68% hadn't engaged in binge drinking. The fact that the majority of students aren't binge drinking may be surprising to those students who hang with the high risk drinkers. We tend to align ourselves with individuals whose idea of a good time matches our own. Students who don't put down four or five drinks in a sitting are probably less surprised by the fact that most students don't binge drink.

Even though the survey further showed that at parties, 77% UO student consumes between 0 and 4 drinks on average, the perceived use is much higher. When asked how many drinks we think most other students consume, we think only 31% of the student body drinks less than five drinks on our typical party night.

Feeling a little skeptical? When you think about it, the survey makes sense. We tend to hang out with others that engage in the same activities as we do. It makes sense that the people who drink heavily tend to hang out with others who drink just as heavily and vice versa. Plus, students who drink on the weekends, and especially the ones who get noticeable intoxicated, typically draw more attention

to themselves than the ones who are less rowdy. This gives the impression that there is a lot more drinking taking place than there truly is. Even though you over hear someone talking on Monday about getting wasted during the weekend, chances are many of the other 20,044 students participated in campus events, saw the latest Ben Affleck flick, went away for the weekend, or just spent a quiet evening at home.

For most students, going to parties is a great way to meet new people and have a good time. However for others, alcohol habits may be forming problems that could turn into a dependency later in life. Surrounding themselves with others in the same boat may reassure them that their drinking is "normal", but may in fact foster heavy drinking. If you feel that you have a problem with alcohol, or want more information there are resources on campus that can help. The Counseling Center is confidential, and they provide both individual and group therapy sessions. Drop-in hours are available; the Counseling Center can be reached at 346-3227. Health Center medical practitioners are also available for consultations and medical check ups. Appointments can be made by calling 346-2770.