

Alcohol: Some Basics

by David Opalinsky, Peer Health Educator

So I'm at this party last week and like usual there were people who had varying opinions on alcohol. It wasn't very hard to tell these people apart. They were either passed out, laughing at those who were passed out, or disgustingly carrying those who were passed out away - I'll let you decide which groups held which opinions.

What remains clear is that even though we may be mature adults in University, we still don't know enough facts about alcohol - but wait!!! Before you begin to think this is just another lecture about drinking, let me assure you as a Health Educator I believe in free choice. I mean if I want to get loaded, I will. If I don't want to drink, I won't. But sometimes it gets hard to make choices when there are a million militant morons feeding you more bull than a rodeo. So let's have some interesting facts, shall we?

I know that I have heard more than a few times that 'some women can hold their alcohol just as well as men.' Though sometimes this seems to be true, it is not generally the case. Even at the same weight as a man, women metabolize alcohol at a slower rate. A woman's body also contains less water than a man's. Therefore, alcohol is diluted less in a woman's body.

Then, there are many 'miracle cures' out there that sober us up so that we don't regret waking up the next morning, right? I've heard of everything from chewing on a couple of Gravols to drinking a pot of coffee. Truth be known, once

alcohol is in the body, it's there to party. Men can metabolize about one drink per hour whereas women may take up to two hours. In most cases, miracle cures end up being duds. For instance, taking a drug such as Gravol will only impede the body's natural defences against alcohol. Giving a person a cold shower will only result in a wet drunk - not to mention smaller problems for men. Then there is my favourite of giving a drunk person coffee. Guess what? Now you have a nice and lively drunk. The bottom line is that alcohol, once in the blood, must run its course. Eating food may delay this and drinking water may stop



dehydration, but alcohol will always find its way into your bloodstream once it enters the body. Only time will sober you up.

Finally, I think that people should know they're not alone in whatever choice they make or in whatever situation they face. Surveys of Alberta campuses over the years consistently find that 15% of students don't drink at all. That's a sizeable proportion of the students and you have to respect that. About 60% of students drink less than once a week while 24% drink 1 to 3 times a week. On average, all of these students consumed less than 4 drinks when they did tie one on.

Enough statistics. We still have to recognize the problems associated with alcohol and act on them appropriately. And I urge anyone who may have questions or concerns seek help as soon as possible. Still, the point is that everyone has the right to make their own decisions within reasonable limits. Besides, wouldn't the world be boring if we were all the same?

For more information on avoiding unplanned pregnancy, managing stress, and generally staying healthy and productive as a student, visit the Student Health Resource Centre, 2-300 SUB, or surf over to www.ualberta.ca/HealthInfo