

A Party Animal's Worst Nightmare

by Amber Dean, Peer Health Educator

Remember the days when someone who drank a beer every day didn't raise eyebrows? Or when someone who had a drink or two at lunch on a weekday wasn't assumed to have a drinking problem?

Drinking patterns, especially among University students, have changed significantly since then. On average, students are drinking less - in fact, 15% of all students don't drink at all. Instead of spreading our drinking out over the entire week, however, some of us now save our drinking until the weekend and head out on a "binge". Drinking too much on these occasions is becoming a more common occurrence, and can lead to a life-threatening condition that is sweeping across North American campuses - acute alcohol poisoning.

Acute alcohol poisoning happens more often than most of us realize, and it is happening on our campus.

Anytime we drink too much, alcohol begins to act as a poison. If we're lucky we'll pass out at this stage. This is the body's way of preventing us from drinking any more. When we drink too much too fast, however, our bodies can skip the passing-out stage and go straight into a coma and death.

So how do we know how much is "too much"?

Acute alcohol poisoning is often linked to drinking games and birthday celebrations where the birthday boy's friends buy him shooter after



shooter. These friendly events can and do kill people. Stop for a minute and imagine what it would be like to know that the friend you encouraged to down nineteen shots last night didn't wake up this morning, and won't wake up ever again. This is a terrifying thought, but there are things you can learn and do that will help prevent it from ever becoming a reality for you.

You need to know that people who have acute alcohol poisoning often have cold, clammy, pale, or bluish skin. Their breathing often slows to less than eight breaths per minute or they may develop an irregular breathing pattern. Anyone who has been drinking and is unconscious and can't be woken is in danger from alcohol poisoning, or of vomiting while "sleeping" and not waking up.

If you recognize any of these signs in someone who you know has been drinking, you need to act immediately to save their lives. You need to do something now. There have been too many

occasions when a caring friend has helped a drunk to bed to “sleep it off”, only to find them dead in the morning.

It doesn't matter if the drinker is underage or not supposed to drink for whatever reason. If you suspect someone may be suffering from acute alcohol poisoning, call an ambulance. Don't ask twenty people for their opinion before you do this - you could cost your friend their life. Next, use the Bacchus Maneuver to roll them into the recovery position so they won't choke if they vomit. If they stop breathing, administer rescue breathing immediately. And stay with the person until medical help arrives.

Acute alcohol poisoning does happen on our campus. If a friend of yours is putting themselves at risk for acute alcohol poisoning, let them know you think they should stop drinking and why. Become aware of the signs of alcohol poisoning and know how to respond - by doing so, we can prevent the tragic and unnecessary death of a fellow student or friend.

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