

# Your Health

A newsletter dedicated to student health issues at Minnesota State University

Fall 2003



## THINKING ABOUT GETTING A TATTOO OR PIERCING?

Whether you are thinking about getting your first tattoo or body piercing or you're an old pro at body art, the following guidelines will help keep your experience a safe one:

- + Read up on body art. Know what you want and what is all involved in the procedure. Be certain the tattoo/piercing decision you make is one you will be happy with for a long time.
- + Ask to see the sterilization equipment the artist uses. The machine used to sterilize needles and other equipment is called an autoclave. Some autoclaves look like a metal pressure cooker while others look like a funny microwave.
- + Surfaces like chairs, counters, tables, and floors should be cleaned with a bleach solution.
- + The artist should wash and dry their hands before putting on gloves. The gloves need to be worn for the entire procedure and changed if they become contaminated. Most gloves used are latex unless you or the artist have a latex sensitivity or allergy.
- + Needles used for piercing and tattooing should be removed from an autoclave bag in front of you. Ask if the needles are new--they should be!
- + Consider getting vaccinated against Hepatitis B. Although most professional body artists use safety precautions, this is one precaution you can take. The vaccination for Hepatitis B is a series of three shots and many college students are already vaccinated. Ask your body artist if they've been vaccinated.
- + All used needles, razors, etc. should be destroyed and/or placed in a "sharps" container, a red bin with a biohazard label on it.
- + Ink, water or other materials used for your piercing or tattoo are placed in smaller, individual containers for your procedure and any "leftovers" should be disposed of, not returned to the universal container.
- + Any body art should be accompanied by clear, easy-to-understand aftercare instructions as well as easy access to the professional artist if serious side effects occur.
- + Additional information about body art can be found at: <http://tattoo.about.com/> (This is a commercial web site but has some valuable educational materials).

### Getting Tested

One of the most effective ways to prevent the spread of HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, is for those who are HIV-infected to take steps to avoid passing the virus on to others. A challenge to this prevention method is many people are infected with HIV for years before they actually seek testing and become aware of their HIV status. Have you engaged in behaviors that put you at risk for infection? Behaviors that expose you to blood, semen or vaginal fluids put you at risk for infection. This includes sex (vaginal, anal, and oral) and needle sharing. Do you know your status?

#### Local HIV testing resources:

MSU Student Health Services--389-6276  
Rural AIDS Action Network (RAAN)--386-0006

#### Anonymous HIV testing resources:

Red Door Clinic, Minneapolis--612-348-6363  
Room 111, St. Paul--651-292-7752



### I'll Quit Smoking...Today!

It's the start of another school year and with that start come changes: different classes and professors, a new dorm room or apartment, maybe even a new romance. For some MSU students it could be time to make the change from smoker to nonsmoker. The MSU Health Education office offers no-cost, weekly smoking cessation meetings for MSU students. The 2003 Fall Semester schedule offers 11 sessions:

#### Are You Kidding Yourself About Smoking? September 16

Myths, Facts, Stages of Change, Smoking Triggers

#### I'm a Social Smoker--September 23

I'll quit after college, I only smoke when I drink...Looking through the smoke screen

#### On the Road to Freedom--September 30

Deep Breathing, Pack Tracks, Why Quit? (Words from a Former Smoker)

#### Wanting to Quit--October 7

Lung-term Effects, Buddy System, Nicotine Replacement Therapy

#### I'm Doing It!--October 14

Positive Thinking, Reward Yourself, Cravings/Relapse

#### Commitment--October 21

Helping Others and Asking for Help, Saying Good-bye

#### Winning Strategies--October 28

Muscle Relaxation, Relapse, Benefits to Quitting, Stress Reducers

#### The New You--November 4

When You Want to Turn to Food

#### Becoming & Staying Clean--November 11

Exercise, Autogenic Training

#### Eye on Your Future--November 18

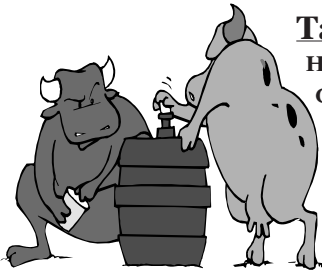
What's New About You? Visualizing Yourself as a Non-Smoker

#### Finals Schminals!--December 2

Ways to Cope, Lifestyle Changes

Students can attend any or all of the sessions, which are offered Tuesdays from 5:00 - 5:45 in the Health Education Office, Carkoski Commons, Room 100. For more information call Health Education @ 389-5689





## Tapping Into Your Alcohol Knowledge

Have you completed all your gen ed classes? How about Intro to Drinking 101?

Okay...so you won't find this class in the official MSU bulletin, but maybe you should. Maybe an intro-level course designed to provide you with facts and insights about alcohol use should be offered for gen ed credit. In the meantime, this article will provide information about alcohol and drinking without the hassle of papers or tests. Of course, the real test is if you use this information to lower the risks associated with drinking.

**Proof** In the United States, proof values are exactly double the alcohol concentration. A 100-proof whiskey is 50% alcohol by volume. The proof value of alcohol indicates its potential intoxicating effects. The proof can also indicate calories since the major calorie-containing ingredient in liquor is alcohol (the higher the proof, the higher the calories).

**A Drink is a Drink is a Drink** One drink is classified as 12 ounces of beer, 1.5 ounces of liquor, or 4-5 ounces of wine. But not all drinks served contain a standard drink's worth of alcohol. Some drinks are served in large or fun-shaped glasses and contain more alcohol than a standard drink. Some malt beverages, such as hard lemonade, contain more alcohol than a standard drink. So if you had one schooner and think you had one beer, think again!

**Blood Alcohol Concentration** The amount of alcohol in your blood stream is referred to as Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC). It is recorded in milligrams of alcohol per 100 milliliters of blood. For example, a BAC of .10 means that 1/10 of 1 percent of your total blood content is alcohol. A person's BAC depends on a number of factors:

**Body Size**--in general, the larger the person, the more body fluids to dilute the alcohol.

**Food**--alcohol is absorbed more slowly when there is food in the stomach.

**Type of beverage**--the concentration of drinks affects the rate at which it is absorbed for two reasons: a person can drink a more concentrated drink (a shot of liquor) faster than a dilute source and the higher the concentration of alcohol, the faster the absorption rate.

**Gender**--due to differences in hormones, body water/body fat ratios, and different levels of a stomach enzyme necessary to metabolize alcohol, women and men tend to handle alcohol differently.

**Drinking history/tolerance**--long-term, heavy drinking can result in an increased tolerance. In our society, people are often admired for their ability to "hold their liquor." The fact is, tolerance is an early warning sign that a physical dependence on alcohol may be developing.

**Physical and emotional state**--factors such as how much sleep a person had the night before, their mood, personality, and their desires and expectations about drinking can affect how one will handle alcohol on any given occasion. If the individual is emotionally upset, under stress, or tired, alcohol may have a stronger impact than normal.

**Medication**--certain medications may affect the body's ability to metabolize alcohol or increase the affect on a person's body.

**Vomiting** Alcohol is an irritant as well as a depressant and in large amounts can really affect the digestive system. If the alcohol is consumed on an empty stomach, it can irritate the stomach lining enough to produce nausea, and even vomiting. Another cause of vomiting is related to a "stuck" stomach valve. If the alcohol can't empty from the stomach to the small intestine, it may "come back up." The mixing of different kinds of drinks, like beer and fuzzy navel, can also cause vomiting (imagine mixing orange juice and coke!).

**Hangovers** Science has yet to determine the exact physiological causes. Possible causes include: congeners (a fermentation by-product), alcohol additives, dehydration, irritation of the digestive tract, and fatigue. There is no cure for a hangover. The best advice is to avoid getting one in the first place by limiting the amount and type of alcohol consumed.

**Alcohol Poisoning** Alcohol depresses the nerves that control involuntary actions such as breathing and the gag reflex (which prevents choking). A fatal dose of alcohol will eventually stop these functions. Signs of alcohol poisoning include:

- +Person is unconscious or semiconscious, and cannot be awakened.
- +Cold, clammy, pale or bluish skin.
- +Slow breathing--between 8-10 seconds between each breath.
- +Vomiting while "sleeping" and not waking up

It's not okay to assume that a passed out person will be fine if they just "sleep it off." Alcohol poisoning is life threatening and medical help is necessary. Call an ambulance or security. Do not leave the person alone. Turn the person on his or her side to prevent choking.

**There you have it: A very brief overview of some alcohol facts and insights. Need more information than this "class" could provide? Contact Wendy Walton, the alcohol and drug education coordinator at MSU, at 389-5689. Or stop by the MSU Health Education office located in Room 100 of Carkoski Commons.**

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