

Smashed, Trashed & Hammered

The Truth about Binge Drinking

BY NICK MCCLELLAN



It is 1 a.m. on Saturday and about 50 people fill your four-bedroom apartment, each holding a drink. The kitchen counter is lined with various hard liquors, mixers and half-empty plastic cups of beer.

On the deck, a group of guys have gathered around to shout in victory as someone finishes a keg stand. Pieces of fruit float in a 20-gallon trashcan of Hunch Punch as people dip in their cups. A few guys enjoy taking body shots off a woman willing to play their game. She gets dizzy, falls to the floor, but she will be ok—you are sure of it.

A little dizzy, you stumble across the room. Just as the sharp, sudden stab of pain subsides, it is hard to remember whether it was the floor or the wall you hit first. Lying dizzy and numb on the floor, you laugh, brushing it off as just a little spill.

As people realize the alcohol supply has dwindled, they begin their trek downtown. You agree to follow, nearly falling down the stairwell on your way outside.

You follow sluggishly on the walk downtown, held up by one of your friends, as your eyes glaze over with fatigue. The night drifts into darkness, and though you may forget how you got home the next morning, your friends remember.

They remember you falling off your barstool onto the floor. They remember being chased out of the bar because you threw up all over the back hallway, just steps from the bathroom. They remember dragging you home, trying to get you to talk, eat or respond to anything.

They remember throwing you into a cold shower to shock you into consciousness. Your friends remember seeing your clammy cold hands, wrapped around your shivering body as they struggled with what to do next.

But most of all, they remember the next day. When you laughed and thanked them for bailing you out. And, that night you did it all over again.



Nights like these are recognizable to many students. According to the American Medical

Association's (AMA) report "A Matter of Degree: The National Effort to Reduce High-Risk Drinking Among College Students," more than 50 percent of all students, on one out of three American college campuses, engage in high-risk or binge drinking. And, more than one-third of these students are living what is called a "party lifestyle," characterized by frequent, deliberate intoxication.

Binge drinking is defined as having five or more drinks in a row for men, four or more for women. And, the consequences of binge drinking can be much more painful than a simple hangover.

The most immediate cost of binge drinking is the increased risk of injury or death from alcohol poisoning. Many students can recall experiencing a night like the one detailed above—taking care of a friend who had one too many. Many symptoms shown by a "sloppy drunk," like cold clammy skin, vomiting and passing out are actually warning signs of alcohol poisoning, a life threatening condition that occurs when someone drinks to the point that their blood alcohol content (BAC) reaches dangerous levels and causes the central

nervous system to slow down.

Binge drinking or high-risk alcohol use is linked to as many as 90 percent of all sexual assaults and date rapes of college students. And the AMA also reports that heavy-drinking college students are 10 times more likely than their peers to drive after drinking and 74 percent are more likely to drive after binge drinking.

There is an increased risk of health problems, as well as a direct impact on a person's ability to learn and remember new information, which can last as long as 30 days. Michael Shutt, an alcohol and other drug health educator with the Health Center at the University of Georgia, points out that statistics show the number of drinks a student consumes weekly has a direct correlation to that student's grade point average (GPA); students who drink an average of three drinks per week generally have A's, while a student averaging nine drinks per week have D's and F's.

The dangers do not stop there. Binge drinking is a major contributing factor for developing alcoholism and people who binge drink are four times more likely to acquire this disease.

Indications that a person may be developing this disease include increase in tolerance of alcohol consumption and blackouts on more than one occasion. Another contributing factor of alcoholism is family history. A binge drinker with a parent or grandparent that has or had alcoholism is at a four times greater risk of developing alcoholism, and should adjust their use accordingly.

If binge drinking is so dangerous, why do students do it? One of the most influencing factors of alcohol consumption is the perceived appropriate use by others—everyone is doing it. Or, so students think.

Students may find that if their peers function well with consuming eight to 10 drinks in one night, then it may be appropriate for them as well. Students should realize that acting according to these perceptions puts them at considerable risk. "Many students only rely on how they are feeling the alcohol (a buzz or numbness) and use this indication as a guide to stop," Shutt says. "However, a person's tolerance changes over time. The buzz may take two drinks to get to right now, but it will increase to four drinks, then six, then eight."

According to the UGA National College Health Assessment, the reported weekly use of alcohol on one or more days by undergrads has remained steady since 2001 at between 77 and 78 percent while the daily admitted use of alcohol by students is below one percent. This statistic is especially shocking since 55 percent of undergrads think their friends drink daily. "These misperceptions are a problem because students gauge their drinking on what they think others are doing," Shutt says. "So, if I believe that the typical student is drinking daily then as long as I am not drinking that much, I am okay. This is not true." Shutt points out that "it's not the norm to drink 10 drinks," and students should not let their perceptions of the actual drinking habits of others influence their own lifestyle choices.

With spring break approaching, many students will knock back more than 10 drinks in one day. While some students view spring break as a well-deserved break from school, others look at it as a week of getting smashed, trashed and hammered. This is a goal for so many that numerous travel companies promote hours of free drinking in their packages aimed at college students. Paradise Parties offers up to 50 hours worth of free drinks as an incentive to book early vacations to Mexico, Jamaica and the Bahamas. Student Travel

Services, a popular spring break travel company with Athens students, also offers hours of unlimited free drinks as an incentive to lure students with its vacation packages.

While seven days of drinks, drinks and more drinks might not sound like a bad thing, remember the consequences. "High-risk alcohol use can impact students directly and indirectly," says Shutt. "Indirect problems range from needing treatment for a sexually transmitted infection to paying fines for underage drinking. A direct, and long-term, effect is the impairment of a person's abstract thinking for 30 days after having those drinks."

Feeling the affects of spring break binges during finals week might not be a spring break souvenir many students are willing to bring home. So instead of getting smashed, trashed and hammered, use common sense, drink in moderation and enjoy spring break safely.

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The Key to Apartment Safety

BY ERIN SMOAK

In the excitement to get out of town for spring break, students tend to overlook the dangers of their property during the week-long escape from Athens. While police increase patrol during breaks, Major Alan Brown of the Athens-Clarke County Police Department says, "Due to the low ratio of officers to citizens in ACC and the large percentage of rental property here, it is impossible for any apartment complex to receive the attention adequate to keep it completely safe."

Preparation taken before students leave is the best safeguard for their property. "You might consider wiping down all your smooth surfaces in order to set up an 'evidence trap' for potential crooks," says Brown. "This includes items that criminals might leave fingerprints on such as doorknobs, window panes, smooth jewelry boxes and any place they may have to touch to get it."

Students should also consider locking away expensive jewelry, laptops, stereos, televisions and other electronic equipment in the trunk of their car or taking them home.

Students in off-campus apartments and houses should attempt to make it appear the residence is occupied. Once valuables have been removed or placed out of view, students should close their blinds and curtains. For the time they are away, mail and newspaper delivery should be stopped. Leave lights on automatic timers, which can be purchased at both Lowe's and Home Depot for five dollars.

The Safe Campuses Now Web site (www.safecampusesnow.org) suggests leaving a radio on a talk show station. This only costs a few cents a day and aids in the impression that someone is home.

The Web site also warns students to never say they are out of town and when they will be returning on an answer machine.

Finally, before walking out the door, check that windows and sliding glass doors are locked. It is preferable that all exterior doors have a dead-bolt lock installed and that it is locked before leaving the residence.

Often a little rest and relaxation is the answer to finishing out a semester at college. With the proper precautions taken, you can enjoy spring break even more, knowing you will return to find your belongings safe.