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IS SNIFFING ALCOHOL BAD FOR YOU?

Probably not, well no worse than drinking it anyway. The introduction to a bar in Bristol last week of a device that allows customers to vaporize and inhale their chosen beverage has provoked predictable outrage, with experts warning of everything from brain damage to being able to pass breathalyzer tests despite being too intoxicated to drive. But according to one of Britain's foremost toxicologists, these fears are overblown.

"I wouldn't have thought it would have any effect on the brain other than the soporific effects that alcohol causes," says Alastair Hay at Leeds University. The alcohol still has to be absorbed into the blood before it reaches the brain, and though this happens much quicker through the nasal membranes than the gut, the maximum alcohol level in the blood should only be about 40-50% higher than if it were ingested. Breathalyzers indirectly measure this blood alcohol.

Heavy users could find themselves facing similar problems to those snorting their way through bags of cocaine. "It would be likely to do some damage to the nasal passages eventually," Hay says. "There would be some irritant effect because alcohol is a defatting agent and if it overloaded cells and damaged them there could be some pathology."



The Awol (alcohol without liquid) device passes oxygen bubbles from an adapted aromatherapy machine over spirits to absorb the alcohol, and then delivers them through a tube. Bypassing the stomach and liver, it offers a much more rapid and intense feeling of intoxication.

What it doesn't do, however, is eliminate the calories. "The calories are in the alcohol itself so it doesn't matter how you take it in," Hay says.

Source: The Guardian February 19, 2004

MARIJUANA LEADS TO OTHER RISKY BEHAVIORS

A survey of Canadian teens finds that those who smoke marijuana are also likely to take part in other risky behaviors, the Canadian Press reported. The survey of 16 and 17-year-olds found that, "the incidence of marijuana use was 1.8 to 2.6 times higher among youth who reported participating in risky behaviors, such as staying out all night without permission, taking money from parents, and damaging others' property."

Statistics for the study were taken from the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, which was developed jointly by Human Resources Development Canada and Statistics Canada. The teens involved in the study were tracked since they were age 10 or 11.

STIMULANTS LIMIT BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

According to a study published in the journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, using cocaine and amphetamines may limit the development of certain areas of the brain that are affected by life experiences. The research, funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), revealed that in laboratory animals, repeated exposure to stimulant drugs caused certain brain cells to fail to develop in ways that a normal brain would develop when exposed to a learning environment. The research involved administering amphetamine, cocaine, and saline to rats for 20 days, then placing the rats in different environments--either standard cages or a complex environment with ramps, bridges, tunnels, and toys--for 3 to 3.5 months.

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METH IS A THREAT, BUT ALCOHOL IS EVEN BIGGER ONE

It was "Meth Awareness Day" at the State Capitol last week. There were exhibits galore about an emerging drug problem in this state and the country. And that's all good. But there should be at least a month set aside for alcohol abuse. In fact, it should be a permanent exhibit. Don't take my word for it. Take Carol Falkowski's or William Moyers' or David DeRusha's. They are just three of many, many folks with front-row seats to the devastation caused by the most destructive drug of all.

"Methamphetamine is a problem, but clearly alcohol is still No. 1," said Falkowski, director of research communications at the Hazelden Foundation. Falkowski was bombarded with phone calls from the media and others last week following the Capitol presentation. Not one of the calls was about alcohol. DeRusha, who oversees the detox center and chemical dependency services in Ramsey County, regales a listener with accounts of abusers walking or escorted by cops or medical personnel to the 50-bed facility with alcohol levels four or five times the legal limit for driving. "There's no comparison," he said.

Recent studies and statistics highlight the debilitating impact such abuse extracts from all of us, whether we drink or not. Alcohol-related incidents or health issues kill 100,000 Americans and cost the country \$185 billion annually - an astounding figure that dwarfs the gross national product of quite a number of countries in the world. According to a study commissioned by the George Washington University Medical Center, although roughly 22 million U.S. residents have a serious alcohol problem, only 2 million to 3 million get help. The study estimated that alcohol abuse costs each man, woman and child in the United States \$683 each year. The numbers are also troubling closer to home.

Estimates released last month by the Minnesota Department of Health place the human and economic costs of alcohol abuse at \$4.5 billion in 2001 - a figure that would have wiped out the record-breaking state budget deficit that caused much legislative angst last year. When broken down, each state resident paid about \$900 that year to cover such losses. Alcohol-related crime cost Minnesotans \$62 million, but, predictably, the greatest impact involved work- and productivity-related losses, which rose to nearly \$3 billion. If you think tax revenue from alcohol sales are absorbing much of the loss, guess again.



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TEEN DRUG ABUSE DECLINES

Monitoring the Future (MTF) 2003 survey data released on December 19, 2003, indicate a decline in overall teen drug use.

The data show statistically significant declines in the number of eighth and tenth grade students that reported using any illicit drug during the past year. According to the data, past year drug use declined from 17.7 to 16.1 percent among eighth graders, from 34.8 to 32.0 percent among tenth graders, and from 41.0 to 39.3 percent among twelfth graders; however, the decline for twelfth graders was not statistically significant.

MTF data also show that the percentage of teens who reported using an illicit drug in their lifetime declined between 2002 and 2003. Lifetime rates of use declined from 24.5 to 22.8 percent among eighth graders, from 44.6 to 41.4 percent among tenth graders, and from 53.0 to 51.1 percent among twelfth graders; however, only the decrease among tenth graders was statistically significant.

TREATMENT ADMISSIONS FOR INJECTION OF MULTIPLE DRUGS

Almost 20 percent of the individuals admitted for treatment at publicly funded treatment facilities who reported injection drug use reported injecting two or more drugs simultaneously or on separate occasions.

These data from the 2000 Treatment Episode Data Set (TEDS) were contained in "Treatment Admissions for Injection of Multiple Drugs: 2000," *The DASIS Report*, December 5, 2003. Cocaine and heroin were the most common drugs reported among admissions who reported injecting multiple drugs. Injection of both cocaine and heroin was reported by 75 percent of these admissions.

Among those reporting heroin as the primary drug, 89 percent injected cocaine as the secondary drug. Among those reporting cocaine as the primary drug, 63 percent injected heroin as the secondary drug. Individuals admitted for treatment also reported injecting methamphetamine and heroin (7%), cocaine and methamphetamine (6%), and various other combinations (12%).

ALCOHOL: BIGGER THREAT THAN METH (continued)

The state collected \$234 million in 2001 - about 19 times less than the total loss amount.

A report last year by the National Academy of Sciences termed underage drinking the "nation's biggest youth drug problem." The report was attacked by the liquor industry, the same entity that bankrolled the expensive and witty beer ads during Super Bowl Sunday that, in small print at the bottom of the screen, informed viewers to "drink responsibly."

Moyers, a recovering addict and Hazelden's vice president of external affairs, was among the millions of viewers. "Frankly, I was scared by what I saw because most of the ads were about beer, and the bigger images overwhelmed the message at the bottom," he said.

"Alcohol is the No. 1 abused drug in America and just because the majority may use it responsibly doesn't diminish at all the tremendous toll it takes across the country, from the urban centers to the quiet suburbs," Moyers added. The Long Island native who hit rock bottom at a crack house in Harlem more than a decade ago supports what many studies say is desperately needed to stem the tide: a comprehensive plan that includes "education for our young people, tough law enforcement, sources for treatment and support for recovery." "I think we can do better," he said, adding that parents, besides setting an example, should realistically engage youths on the pitfalls of abuse rather than lecture them. Falkowski, who wrote a book on alcohol and drug abuse, believes a larger societal change in attitude and culture is in order.

She frequently monitors liquor stores and other businesses that prominently display "alcopop" products and pastel-colored drinks in test tube-like vessels called "shooters" that are clearly marketed to young drinkers. She still remembers the woman in her book who decided to allow an unconscious, underage drinker to sleep off a drunken stupor. The youth never woke up.

"She said that she never knew someone could die from drinking too much," Falkowski said. "College drinking is as entrenched as ever. Drinking is still considered a legitimate rite of passage. That's what we're working against."

The above story is not intended to take anything away from the methamphetamine problems throughout the state.

Source: Saint Paul Pioneer Press, February 9, 2004

ILLICIT DRUG AVAILABILITY AMONG YOUTH

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) recently reported that more than half (55 percent) of youths aged 12 to 17 felt that marijuana was easy to obtain. More specifically, 79 percent of youths aged 16 or 17 indicated that marijuana was easy to obtain, while 60 percent of those aged 14 or 15 and 26 percent of those aged 12 or 13 indicated marijuana was easy to obtain.

Based on data from the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), the report also indicates that nearly 17 percent of youths reported that they had been approached in the past month by someone selling drugs. Males (20%) were more likely to have been approached than females (13%). Past month illicit drug use for youths aged 12 to 17 was higher for those who perceived that it was easy to obtain an illicit drug as well as for those who were approached by someone selling drugs in the past month.

The rate of past month marijuana use was 14.1 percent for youths who perceived it was easy to obtain marijuana compared to 1.2 percent for those that indicated marijuana was hard to obtain. Over one-fourth (29.4%) of youths who had been approached by someone selling drugs in the past month reported past month marijuana use, while only 3.9 percent of those not approached reported past month marijuana use.

STIMULANTS LIMIT BRAIN ACTIVITY (continued)

They found that the drug-exposed rats that were placed in complex environments failed to develop brain cell structures that the saline-injected rats developed. These brain cells are located in areas that control motivation/reward and sensory motor function. According to one of the study's lead researchers, the findings indicate that at least some of the cognitive and behavioral advantages that accrue with experience may be diminished by prior exposure to psycho-stimulant drugs. Moreover, the impairment of the ability of specific brain circuits to change in response to experiences may help explain some of the behavioral and cognitive deficits seen in drug-addicted individuals.

DOSE RELATED RISK OF MOTOR VEHICLE CRASHES AFTER CANNABIS USE

A recent article in the journal *DRUG AND ALCOHOL DEPENDENCE* analyzes the role of 9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) in the driver impairment and motor vehicle crashes.

The article, authored by J. G. Ramaekers, G. Berghaus, M. van Laar, and O. H. Drummerd, points out that experimental studies have repeatedly shown that THC impairs cognition, psychomotor function, and actual driving performance in a dose related manner. Detrimental effects of THC were more prominent in certain driving tasks than others. Highly automated behaviors, such as road tracking control, were more affected by THC as compared to more complex driving tasks requiring conscious control.

Epidemiological findings on the role of THC in vehicle crashes have sometimes contrasted findings from experimental research. Case control studies generally confirmed experimental data, but culpability surveys showed little evidence that crashed drivers who only used cannabis are more likely to cause accidents than drug free drivers. Surveys that established recent use of cannabis by directly measuring THC in blood (rather than metabolites that might indicate THC use days before) showed that THC positives, particularly at higher doses, are about three to seven times more likely to be responsible for their crash as compared to drivers that had not used drugs or alcohol. Together these epidemiological data suggests that recent use of cannabis may increase crash risk, whereas past use of cannabis does not.

Combined use of THC and alcohol produced severe impairment of cognitive, psychomotor, and actual driving performance in experimental studies and sharply increased the crash risk in epidemiological analysis.

MILLIONS HAVE DRIVEN ON DRUGS – U.S. SAYS

WASHINGTON (AP) -- An estimated 11 million Americans, including nearly one in five 21-year-olds, have driven while under the influence of illegal drugs, the government says. The numbers were especially high for college students. Eighteen percent of students surveyed said they drove while on drugs last year, compared with 14 percent of their peers who weren't in college. John Walters, director of the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy, said the statistics show a failure to convince drivers that drugs impair driving as much as alcohol does. His office is kicking off an ad campaign to warn teens about driving while smoking marijuana. "Marijuana is not the soft drug. Marijuana is not the casual rite of passage," Walters said at a news conference. "We have been sending the wrong message." Walters said marijuana can affect concentration, perception, coordination and reaction time for up to 24 hours after smoking it.

Officials also cited a recent study that said 15 percent of high school seniors have driven under the influence of marijuana. That study, published in May, analyzed 2001 data collected as part of the University of Michigan's annual "Monitoring the Future" study, which questioned 44,000 students in 424 public and private schools in the country. Nineteen-year-old Theodore Stevens of New Jersey told reporters that he believed smoking pot and driving wasn't dangerous despite getting into four accidents in three years. He says he's lucky none of those incidents caused serious injuries. "Sometimes I believed it increased my driving performance," said Stevens, who has been in drug treatment for four months after being charged with possession of marijuana, cocaine and heroin. Stevens began smoking pot when he was 14.

The report, compiled by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, used 2002 data from the National Survey on Drug Use and Health. The survey questioned 68,000 people. Researchers then extrapolated the percentages to the population as a whole. A federal statistician said the margin of error was plus or minus 4.5 percentage points. For 21-year-olds, the rate of those who reported driving under the influence of drugs was 18 percent, the highest of any age group. That dropped off to 14.5 percent for 22-year-olds. Unemployed adults age 26 to 49 also had a high frequency of driving while drugged -- 9.3 percent, compared with 5.1 percent for drivers employed full time. Among racial or ethnic groups, American Indians reported the highest rate of driving while drugged, at 6.3 percent compared with 5 percent of whites, 4.5 percent of blacks, 3.7 percent of Hispanics, 3.1 percent of Pacific Islanders and 1.3 percent of Asians.

Dr. Jeffrey Runge, head of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, said there were approximately 38,000 crashes last year involving drivers impaired by marijuana. But Runge said he didn't know how many fatal accidents were caused by drugged drivers. State data collection is spotty, Runge said, and many drivers who are driving while drugged are also drinking. "While we don't have fixed data, impairment is impairment," he said.

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NHTSA REPORTS ON DRUG IMPAIRED DRIVING

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration http://www.hazeldenbookplace.org/authors/Authors_bio.asp?author_id=665 has issued the final report of a project entitled *State of Knowledge of Drug Impaired Driving*. The project was conducted by Mid-America Research Institute. This review examines research published during the 1981-2001 period and references some earlier material contained in prior reviews. The scope of the review included foreign as well as U.S. literature with a direct bearing in highway safety. The review emphasizes controlled substances to include marijuana, benzodiazepines, sedative, and hypnotic drugs. However, research related to any other drugs having the potential to significantly impair driving is also included in the review. It includes research pertinent to the detection and measurement of drugs in drivers, the experimental literature (including laboratory testing of human performance and driving simulator and closed course testing), epidemiologic studies of drugs and traffic crashes, and literature on countermeasures for drug impaired