

Safe drinking and shoe protection strategies:

Enjoying bars and parties

By B.T. Chelmsford

Next time you walk into a bar, ask yourself why you're there. You'll probably have several answers. Among the most common:

- You want to watch the Canucks crush their bitter rivals on the big screen
 - You want to crush your roommates at pool
 - You have a crush on the bartender or server
- Aside from these excellent reasons, you might also be there to drink. If you're of legal age, well-nourished and emotionally stable, a moderate amount of alcohol probably won't hurt you. But there are a few things to remember before you order a drink.

First, don't drink on an empty stomach. Eat before you drink, and feel free to snack while you're drinking. Food slows alcohol absorption and can protect your stomach from the harsher effects of alcohol. You can avoid the embarrassment of getting wasted before Marcus Naslund scores his first goal.

Avoid drinking as a game. Guzzling competitions are unattractive and potentially messy, especially when the contents of your rival's stomach end up all over your new shoes. Moreover heavy drinking can lead to unacceptable behavior, including vandalism and

violence. Police note how often drunks get into trouble and end up in the drunk tank, which is not a great place to spend a night.

Every year there are reports from hospital emergency wards—including UBC's—about injuries sustained by people who've had too much to drink. Some develop alcohol poisoning and need their stomachs pumped. Others sustain serious cuts and bruises tripping over furniture or falling down stairs. Some sustain brain damage. Some end up dead. That's why campuses all over the world discourage drinking games and over-consumption.

If you've arrived at a party to drown your sorrows, you'll find that this method of dealing with unhappiness or disappointment is ineffective after the booze wears off. In fact, since alcohol is a depressive, you'll probably end up feeling worse. Your girlfriend or boyfriend may have dumped you, your instructor might have failed you, or your boss might have laid you off, but no amount of beer will improve your circumstances. If you've had bad luck, find somebody to talk to. On campus there's always a willing listener somewhere. At a party or bar, however, it's difficult to hear anybody while the music blares

and sports fans cheers the action on the big screen. Besides, people go to bars to have a good time, not necessarily to hear about your problems. You'll get better support from a sober acquaintance in residence than from a plastered party animal who can't hear you.

Don't drink alone. Go to parties with friends. Solitary boozing can become a bad habit that leads to higher alcohol consumption. It's often a sign of problem drinking and alcoholism. Besides, it's not as much fun as a pint with a friend or classmate.

It's wise to pace yourself when you're at a party. Generally one drink per hour is a safe limit, although some people react badly to even smaller amounts of alcohol. It's unwise to "pound" drinks for a fast buzz, since your system was not designed to tolerate huge quantities of alcohol in short periods. Your stomach's natural reaction to a sudden deluge of vodka or beer might be to void all contents with extreme prejudice. This is not a good experience for you, your friends or your floor.

Some students believe that heavy drinking is an academic rite of passage and a serious tradition that all must respect. There is no law, however, that forces you to drink if you don't

feel like it. You are entitled to drink as little as you please.

Admittedly you'll meet people who aggressively encourage their companions to drink more and more. ("What's wrong with you anyway? Here, have another. And another. And another.") You need not feel guilty in turning them down, no matter how frequently they insist that you have a drink. You're always free to say no.

Refusing a drink can sometimes be a matter of personal security. Lately police and public health officials have broadcast warnings about date-rape drugs such as GHB and Rohypnol and, which any pharmacy major will tell you is the brand name for Flunitrazepam, which is a form of benzodiazepine. What you should know about these drugs is that criminals use them to sedate a victim—usually female—before sexually assaulting her.

This ugly process is simple. The criminal offers the intended victim a drink spiked with a date-rape drug. Sometimes unattended drinks are spiked while their owners are on the dance floor. Within 30 minutes of ingesting the drug, victims feel nauseated, dizzy and

"spacey" or "woozy", even though she might have had little to drink. In this condition victims are easily coerced into a more private place. The victim can fall unconscious, and will not recall the events that occurred after she accepted the spiked drink.

Unfortunately numerous date-rape incidents have been reported across North America. Police advise you not to accept a drink from anyone you don't know and trust, and not to leave your glass unattended, even at a party where you know most of the guests. There is a risk of date-rape drugs wherever alcohol is served.

To protect yourself, invite a friend to accompany you to parties and bars. Your friend can not only keep you company, but also help you to stay out of trouble. He or she will know your plans for the evening, and will note any unusual circumstances or problems with the people around you.

You know that that you shouldn't drink and drive, and that even a small amount of alcohol can affect your judgement and reduce your driving skills. You've heard many stories about horrendous accidents caused by drunk drivers. You've seen newspaper photos of man-

gled cars. So you realize that a bus or taxi is the right choice after an evening at a party or bar.

Recently Translink, which operates buses across the Lower Mainland, has increased late-night service from downtown Vancouver to the campus. The goal is to keep drunks off the road and get them home safely. The bus also offers you an opportunity to avoid parking expenses, which increase every year.

If you think that you can drive safely after a few drinks, reconsider. Even one drink can slow your reactions. Most accidents happen in a split second. If alcohol has reduced your reaction time, your chances of totaling your car and sustaining or causing serious injuries are substantially higher. Catch a bus, or grab a cab. If your friend has abstained, he or she can be your designated driver.

Your friend will also share a big order of nachos, and won't mind if you don't want to drink heavily. You two can play foosball, make requests to the DJ, dance, and keep an eye on each other's drinks. Above all, you can enjoy a safe evening, meet attractive and reasonable people who won't ruin your shoes, and arrive home in good condition. Now you know why you're in that bar.

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