

Booze. Hooch. The hard stuff. Rotgut. Moonshine. White lightning. Grog. The demon rum. The bottle. The sauce. Grandpa's cough medicine. Old Jack. Jagerbombs. Breakfast. Whatever you know it as, alcohol is a defining substance of student life. Whether it's a beer up in RATT after a tough exam, cheap highballs at a nightclub on a Friday night, or a bottle of wine on your birthday, most students just can't resist a good time with a glass in hand.

Even if you don't drink, you undoubtedly have friends that partake in the consumption of libations or attend licensed events that get a little louder than usual when the beer flows freely. But despite the social nature and popularity of drinking, there are both benefits and consequences to your body when you down that triple scotch or strawberry daiquiri. So in the sole interest of students' well-being, the *Gateway* is back one more time to let you know just what's on tap when you decide to chug one down.

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Daily Dosage

Between the time you crack the cap on your first brewski and the time you drunkenly profess your profound love for everyone in the room and pass out on a couch, it's easy to tell that the alcohol you consumes has effects on your brain.

"Pharmacologically, ethanol provides a progressive activation of [gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA)] receptors, which is an inhibitory transmitter," Dr. David Cook, a professor in the Department of Pharmacology, explains, adding that "it's difficult for people to understand how a sedative drug can give you the excitement—people getting into fights and seducing each other—that alcohol seems to do.

"At low dose, it inhibits the circuits responsible for good behaviour that are designed to keep us in check," he continues. "It has behavioural effects before it starts to damp down major physiological functions." This explains why you're such a smooth dancer earlier in the night before stumbling home later.

And as anyone who's ever been to the bar later in the night has experienced, the bathrooms are always packed. Besides its effects in the brain, alcohol also has various effects through your system—starting with your kidneys.

According to Cook, "it inhibits the release of anti-diuretic hormone, which is the hormone that prevents us from peeing—and, as a result, you lose a lot of water, which makes you thirsty, so you tend to drink more.

"Also, it tends to vasodilate you, which is why you get pink when you drink, which actually makes you colder. You feel warmer, but you're actually losing heat faster."

Some of the common rules that people follow when drinking, despite sounding like old wives' tales, are actually backed up by science. So when you tell yourself you'll only have two drinks because you'll be driving home in three hours, you're implicitly trusting that your liver can keep up.

Thankfully, due to the way metabolism works, you'd be right. The liver

removes alcohol at a constant rate, which both allows you to follow the one-hour rule and allows you to keep a buzz going for hours if you overindulge.

"You can only eliminate one drink per hour because [ethanol's] elimination kinetics are a little different from most other drugs, which is the basis for that old rule of thumb," Cook says. "If you have three drinks in a hurry, the other two drinks circulate around in the blood, getting you drunk, while the body attempts to get rid of that first drink you had."

One of the most controversial topics these days is mixing energy drinks with alcohol, due both to its popularity among students and questions as to its safety. According to Cook, the issue is mostly a matter of realizing how impaired you actually are.

"Alcohol has a few saving graces. It's not particularly potent, so if you want to kill yourself with alcohol, you have to be pretty determined. If you have enough of it, it'll make you dopey, which isn't really a bad thing because you may not be able to get that glass to your mouth anymore. But [if] you have an energy drink, you'll wake up, but you're still intoxicated. By combining energy drinks and vodka, you don't tend to get so sleepy, but it doesn't mean you're sane or safe. It creates wide-awake drunks."

Provided that you don't go overboard on combinations like that, however, the occasional drink can be beneficial for your health. We've all heard the benefits of having a glass of wine every day, and Cook notes that there is scientific evidence to back that up—so long as you're consistent.

"People who drink modest amounts of alcohol—I stress the word *modest*—seem to have a slightly lower incidence of cardiovascular disease. There's no evidence that someone who's a teetotaler who starts drinking gets that advantage."

Survey says: you're a lush

In the university population, as in the general population, there are teetotalers, abstainers, and everyone in

between. In 2004, a nationwide survey of alcohol use was conducted on several Canadian campuses, including the U of A. The resulting *Canadian Campus Survey of Alcohol and Drug Use* surveyed 7000 students, and according to Dr Cam Wild, an associate professor at the U of A Addiction and Mental Health Research Laboratory, this data is the most recent information we have on student drinking habits.

"About 77 per cent of undergraduates drank alcohol in the last month prior to the survey," Wild explains. "Although a vast majority of students drink, the majority of them don't actually get into trouble at all, which is a very positive thing. In general, alcohol use increases over the years of study—and males drink more than females, absolutely."

Wild stresses that despite the large majority of responsible student drinkers, the minority that engage in hazardous practices and overconsumption stand to risk serious physical and lifestyle consequences.

Of the 77 percent, he said, "over 40 per cent of them report heavy binge drinking, which we define as drinking five or more standard drinks at least every two weeks or more frequently."

"Not every heavy drinker has alcohol problems," he says. "But about a third of drinkers do among undergraduates. About a quarter of student drinkers say they report doing things while drunk that they regret later, and about 15 per cent report that they have to miss class because they're too hung over. If drinking is interfering with things in your life that you want to do, these are early signs that you're drinking in a hazardous way, and you might want to reconsider your drinking patterns."

Judy Hancock, health education coordinator with the University Health Centre, also stresses the ways alcohol can negatively affect one's social life, ranging from poor sexual performance to dropping out of school entirely.

"One of the things that I see in my work is I see young men, 18–20 years old, coming in here with erectile problems," Hancock says. "And it's drinking-related. So I like to tell guys, 'You



READING WEEK IS SURE TO BRING LOTS OF PARTIES AND, with them, the chance to meet lots of drunk and easily impressed people. This often requires more than just witty banter, though (which no one remembers the next morning anyways) and puts you in need of a good party trick—and fast. And with a week full of debauchery and college hijinks only one day away, there really isn't much time to lose. Luckily, flair bartending—the most impressive of all party tricks—can be easily faked by learning a few simple moves as taught by former president of the U of A Flair Bartending Club Allan Greene.

BEHIND THE BACK

The point of this trick is to throw a bottle and catch it behind your back, impressing all your friends with the easiest flair move out there. Put one hand on the small of your back, palm up. This will be your catching hand. Extend the other out in front of you, holding the bottle by the neck. The trick to this is that you're not actually throwing the bottle behind you—you're throwing it straight up and turning your body to catch it. Throw the bottle straight up and not too high, and watch it all the way into your catching hand, securing the bottom of the bottle in your palm.

THE COCKTAIL MOVE

A move featured in both *Cocktail* and *Coyote Ugly*, the point of this stunt is to flip a bottle over your hand and catch it upside down, pouring the liquor into a cup. Put your arm out in front of you, holding a bottle by the neck. In your other hand, have a glass ready to pour into. To flip the bottle, flick your wrist out and release, letting the bottle spin one and a half times over your hand and back into the middle of your body. Grab

the bottle by the neck when it's upside down, and hold it over the awaiting cup. Don't forget to do your best pre-scientology Tom Cruise impression.

THE STALL

The point of this trick is to flip the bottle up onto the back of your outstretched hand. Hold the bottle with the neck running in between your outstretched index and middle fingers into your palm. Flick the bottle up just high enough that you can slip your hand, palm down, under it. Let it rotate almost 360 degrees, so the bottom is once again facing down. The trick is to make contact with just one edge of the bottom first, allowing the bottle's rotation to bring it in full contact with the top of your hand, like a closing door. Although this trick is more advanced, it's also the most impressive.

Just remember: if you want to look good in time for the party, do a little practice. If you do these for real, you'll be flipping glass bottles full of booze around, and nothing's worse than shattering your drinks for the night on the ground.

—Tom Wagner