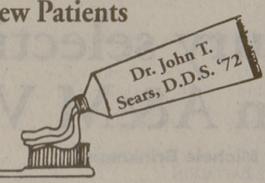


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HEALTH TIPS
Students: Take Caution at Bonfire

By Sharon Drumheller
 A.P. BEUTEL HEALTH CENTER
 Bonfire. With this one word, Aggies everywhere conjure up images of spirit, tradition, and rivalry. Bonfire is a celebration of a heritage understood only by those who are associated with Texas A&M University. Many of the festivities that accompany Bonfire include the use of alcohol and other drugs.
 Pre-parties. Post-parties. Does anyone go only to Bonfire? Most A&M students look forward to Bonfire with great anticipation while much planning goes into how the entire evening will be spent. What many students do not plan for are possible negative consequences to excessive use of alcohol and other drugs. Having sex while under the influence of alcohol can be dangerous.
 Exactly what is "sex under the influence" or SUI? It is considered SUI anytime drugs, including alcohol, are used before sexual activity. The risks associated with SUI include, transmission of a sexually transmitted disease (STD) such as Human Immunodeficiency Virus, unintended pregnancy, and forced sexual intercourse.
 People engage in sex under the influence for many reasons. One reason may be that moral judgments have been broken down. A person may be more susceptible to persuasive arguments that go against individual moral values due to a decreased ability to think rationally.
 Alcohol and other drug use may provide the courage to engage in sexual activity. Alcohol may decrease anxieties related to the sex role, thus providing "liquid courage" to approach a romantic interest.
 With SUI there is often a perceived enhancement of sexual activity. Alcohol and other drugs actually increase the potential for sexual activity by lowering inhibitions and anxiety, eliminating guilt and creating feelings of more sexual energy. However, the use of drugs, including alcohol, decreases sexual functioning.
 SUI may also take the stress out of sexual decision-making. This may cause a person to make a decision that would not have been made under different circumstances.
 Finally, having sex under the influence provides an excuse. By explaining sexual activity away as, "I was drunk," a person is able to rationalize the behavior. It is easier to blame the drug than to take responsibility for actions taken.
 A person under the influence may be less able to negotiate sexual activity or detect risky situations. Unplanned sexual activity is more likely to occur when alcohol is involved, thus decreasing the likelihood of practicing safer sex. Additionally, impaired judgment will make it less likely that a person will recognize a risky, and potentially dangerous, situation before it is too late.
 If alcohol and other drugs are part of your Bonfire plans, please take some time to consider the following suggestions before you go out:
 1. Decide before going out, "How do I want to feel tomorrow about what happens tonight?" and then act accordingly;
 2. Make it clear to yourself, and others if appropriate, what you want and do not want;
 3. Define limits of both sexual activity and alcohol consumption;
 4. Stay in control of environment and avoid risky situations; and
 5. Take responsibility for your own actions and make decisions based on what is best for you.

Democrats seek ethnic support

HOUSTON (AP) — Texas Democratic candidates, already facing voter disenchantment with President Clinton, might also find their traditional base of support in black neighborhoods has crumbled, according to some political activists.
 While black voters are not expected to break party ranks in great numbers in the Nov. 8 election, some think many just won't cast ballots because the issues and contenders don't inspire them.
 "I don't see any great issues or, in fact, motivations for African-Americans to rush to the polls to vote," said state Rep. Ron Wilson, a Houston Democrat who is black.
 "The opinion of Democratic candidates is that we have no place to go, but they forget that we can just stay home," Wilson told the Houston Chronicle in Monday's editions.
 Beulah Shepard, a longtime political operative who is black, agrees with Wilson.
 "The Democratic stuff is almost in shambles the way I see it," said Shepard, who works for Democratic state Sen. John Whitmire. "They have done nothing to fire up the community."
 Other black leaders have jumped to the Democratic Party's defense.
 Democratic state Rep. Sylvester Turner, a former Houston mayoral candidate, has radio commercials encouraging black to exercise their hard-fought right to vote.
 Turner reminds listeners that several black Democratic judicial candidates are on the ballot along with accountant Kevin Newsome, who would be the first black elected to a Harris County administrative office if he wins his bid for district clerk.
 And Democrat Grady Prestage, Fort Bend County's only black commissioner, predicts turnout among black voters will be as high as ever.
 "We have more to lose" than other voters, said Prestage, who was appointed to the Lamar University board of regents by Richards. "I sense out there not a sense of excitement but a sense of desperation, that life as we know it may change unless our voices are heard."
 Most agree a strong black turnout is essential to the electoral fortunes of Richards, as well as some other Democratic candidates.
 State Sen. Rodney Ellis, a black Democrat from Houston, said Richards' strategists are counting on a 50 percent turnout in black precincts. But Ellis said when the presidential race isn't on the ballot, black turnout is usually about 35 percent — a difference of about 30,000 votes in Harris County.
 "We need a bigger turnout this go-around to make up for the level of cynicism that exists statewide in Texas toward politicians in general," Ellis said. "We've got to make up for some Democratic votes she got last time that the polling data show she may not have this year (against Republican George W. Bush)."
 The Democratic Party is working with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and clergy alliances to promote Democratic candidates through community meetings, telephoning and mail. National black leaders also are scheduled to campaign in Houston for Democrats.

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 By Amy Le
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