

Can't dance it or shower it away: only time will make you sober

Danger doesn't start or stop on grad night—that's why planning before the party a good lifelong habit

Last week we began talking about impaired driving, and the myth surrounding drinking, metabolisms, and blood alcohol levels. Here are a couple of other "oldies but goodies" you'll hear circulating around the table or campfire, particularly (of course) after the drinks start flowing.

Firstly, many people believe that beer is "safer" to drink than hard liquor. Not true. Beer is sometimes cheaper to drink than hard liquor, I'll grant that, but alcohol is alcohol. It's the ethanol content of alcohol that causes intoxication, and ethanol levels are the same in 12 ounces of beer, 5 ounces of wine and 1.5 ounces of hard liquor. Light beer contains slightly less alcohol, and consequently slightly less ethanol, but you most certainly can still become impaired by drinking it. Same goes for water-based mixes: it may slow the absorption rate, but the same amount of alcohol is going to wind up in your system, with the same predictable results.



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How about the idea that if you don't switch or mix drinks, you won't become impaired as quickly? As you've probably guessed, this just simply isn't so, for the reason stated in the above paragraph—booze, in any form, is still booze.

No quick fix

Ever watched someone try sober up a friend by alternating cup after cup of coffee with brisk walks/drags around the parking lot? No go, I'm afraid. The liver must metabolize alcohol (that's how you become sober) and that takes time. Fresh air and exercise do nothing to speed up the process. Coffee is a stimulant, so all that "cure" creates is a

very awake, very jumpy but no less intoxicated friend.

I'm a little hesitant to bring this next one up, simply because it has provided so many of us with so much viewing pleasure over the years.

The truth is... no, you cannot dance yourself sober. You can shake your booty to your heart's content, but you won't do anything other than make the highlight reel for everyone watching your John Travolta impression at Lost Disco Night. The only thing that will overcome the effects of alcohol is time.

Plan ahead

Thankfully, there are alternatives to worrying if you're sober enough to drive.

You can, for example, agree that someone in the group will act as the designated driver. Remember that you owe this person a great deal, so treat them with the respect and admiration they deserve. If they want Corn Nuts,

you buy them Corn Nuts, you know what I'm saying?

You can also take a cab or a bus. The cost of the fare is nothing like the cost you'll be facing if you roll the dice and lose. And, of course, you can always choose not to drink.

I'd like to take a moment to send a special message to the 16 to 19 year-olds who may be reading this column: you are more likely to be involved in drinking driving accidents than any other age group, and the risk is higher with each drink you take.

You are also least likely to listen to a thing I have said.

Since I may not be able to influence you, I'd like to appeal to the parents, guardians, mentors, coaches and influencers of this group. Please, take the time to hammer home the importance of not driving a car if they've been drinking. Offer them alternatives; give them cab fare or promise them a ride home if they need

it. Fight about it the next morning, if you have to, but keep the agreement that night.

Graduation 2000 will soon be in full swing. While most schools in Manitoba take part in Safe Grad celebrations, grad weekends are statistically high-risk times for teenagers, who are already over-represented in injuries and fatalities. If you are the parent of a son or daughter graduating this year, take a time out from the planning and remind them that the danger doesn't start and end on grad night, nor does the need to plan a safe ride home before the party starts. It's a conversation you can't afford to put off.

That's it for this week. Until next week, be **RoadWise**.

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