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Love yourself enough to protect yourself

HEALTH & FITNESS

It isn't that students don't know what safe sex is, it's that many choose to ignore the information

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Safe sex — college students know the information — many just choose to ignore it. Research shows that less than half of college students consistently use condoms, and nearly 25 percent never use them at all. One study found that more than half of students with a history of sexually transmitted disease (STDs) had sex while infected, and 25 percent of them continued doing so without informing their partners.

Despite being highly knowledgeable about STDs, college students consistently underestimate their risk for sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and engage in risky sexual behavior anyway. That is the reason the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that 9.5 million, or half, of the 19 million new cases of STDs this year, will be among people aged 15-24 years old.

It is estimated that one out of every two sexually active people will contract an STD by the time they are 45 years old. The statistics are staggering and the message is clear: USE CONDOMS. Even though the words have become an unofficial school song and a Trojan is coming close to replacing our beloved Ram, now is the time to take the knowledge from your cortex and put it into action.

To help translate safe sex knowledge into actual skills, practice the following tips.

Don't drink and drive — you have heard that before, and the same message goes for sex. Mood altering drugs like alcohol and others affect your judgment. Having sex while intoxicated significantly increases your risk for STDs. Between 30-50 percent of college students report having sex while intoxicated.

Limit the number of

partners. Avoid sexual contact with people who have engaged in risky sexual behavior or injection drug use in the past. Many people are embarrassed to admit their sexual histories and it is easy to underestimate a partner's sexual experiences. One study reported that 30 percent of college students had ten or more partners.

Use condoms during every sexual encounter and use them properly. Just because someone says they are STD free, doesn't mean they are. Less than half of adults 18-44 years old have ever been tested for an STD other than HIV. Also, many STDs like, chlamydia, genital herpes, and HPV infection, to name a few, have no visible symptoms. "Look, I don't have any blisters or sores" is not a valid argument for unprotected sex.

When using condoms, buy the kind with a reservoir at the tip. Put the condom on correctly. Always

put the condom on prior to sex.

Avoid sexual contact that causes cuts or tears in the skin. Open wounds increase the risk of STD transmission.

Get periodic screenings, familiarize yourself with symptoms of disease, and seek treatment quickly. Women should get yearly pelvic exams and pap tests. And for both genders, don't be embarrassed to ask your physician for STD screening. Simply say that you are sexually active and would like to be screened for STDs. If more people did this, STD rates would decrease.

Symptoms for STDs vary. If after risky sexual relations you have flu-like symptoms, unusual discharge, lesions, bumps or wart like growths, pain during urination or intercourse, or pain in the abdomen or other locations, consult a physician immediately. Seeking treatment quickly will

limit your risk for long term complications like infertility.

Get vaccinated for Hepatitis B. One out of 20 people in the United States will get infected with hepatitis B some time during their lives. The vaccine is safe and effective and just a smart move for a disease that is 100 times more infectious than HIV.

Enjoy sex on your own terms and learn how to talk about sex with you partner. One study found that one third of female students consented to sex because they simply felt uncomfortable refusing. Refusing sexual encounter that you do not want is completely acceptable. Make sexual decisions prior to being in the "heat of the moment". When talking to your partner, be honest, use language you are comfortable with, and be direct.

Don't fall victim to peer pressure. Among college students, African

American and Latina women reported higher levels of unwanted non-condom use than white women, meaning the students intended to use a condom but did not because of pressure from their partner. Women, whose sexual partners were non-condom users, were 4 times more likely to feel that asking their partner to use a condom implied mistrust. If you are honest and open, it is more likely that your partner will be too. Develop phrases and language you can use to talk about condom use. If you still feel awkward, just simply say you always use condoms regardless of your partner's sexual history.

Christmas break is nearly here and there will be more time for "extra curricular" activities. Use your safe sex knowledge. Don't come back to campus singing, "On the first day of Christmas, My true love gave to me, Genital herpes and other STDs."

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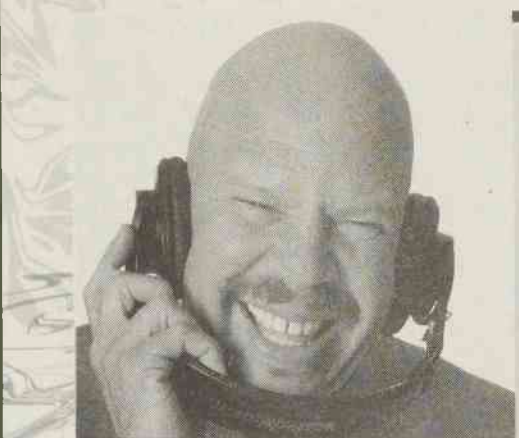
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