

# Students may be leaving the gym with more than sweaty towels

**Megan Myers**

*Reporter*

Doctors' appointments and college breaks go hand-in-hand. Parents flock to make dentist and dermatology appointments as students flood home.

What if the dentist informed you that all those late nights spent studying fueled by bottles of soda has left you with a new cavity? Or worse, what if the dermatologist told you that all that lifting at the gym, swimming and tanning has exposed you to a common noncancerous viral skin growth? Students with defined biceps, washboard abdomens and pulsating calf muscles leave college fitness centers with energy, flushed cheeks and sweat-soaked towels each day. But these are not the only things with which they leave, only the ones that can be seen.

Molluscum contagiosum could be lurking on the handlebars of a stationary bicycle, the seat cushion of a bench press or a shared towel. Similar to warts but caused by poxviruses, molluscipoxvirus molluscum contagiosum is easily spread by skin-to-skin contact and can

enter the body through small breaks in the skin or hair follicles.

As you read this article, your palms begin to sweat and your heart begins to pound. I work out. I go tanning. Do I have molluscum contagiosum?

Once thought of as a children's disease, molluscum contagiosum has evolved into a sexually transmitted disease in adults. There are several other ways to acquire the virus.

While molluscum contagiosum can be transmitted sexually, it can also be transmitted from inanimate objects, including towels and clothing, and it is associated with swimming pools and tanning beds. Autoinoculation, touching a lesion and touching another part of the body, can also transmit the disease.

"It's common," said Kitty Parrish, director of the R.N Ellington Health Center and nurse practitioner, "Lots of people have it."

Once infected, two to five millimeter diameter flesh-colored or pink dome-shaped growths will appear in clusters on almost any part of the body, excluding the palms and soles. Molluscum may be shiny and have a small indenta-

tion in the center. Lesions are usually found in areas where skin touches skin. Molluscum may become red and inflamed, which occurs just before the growth is ready to go away on its own.

"If it isn't typical," Parrish said. "It's hard to diagnose and can initially look like ring worm." Similar to any other contagious infection, the more a person is exposed to the virus, the more likely he is to develop lesions. Young children, who have not yet developed immunity to the virus, those who live in tropical climates and those infected with HIV are most susceptible to the virus.

"The best way to prevent infection is to wash your hands," Parrish said. "While molluscum can be sexually transmitted, one can also become infected through close personal contact. Just make sure you see equipment at the gym cleaned and remember that molluscum is self-limited, it goes away by itself."

"Some gyms place towels and cleaning products next to machinery other than cardiovascular equipment, but its not very sanitary," Michelle Zimmer, assistant director of Campus Recreation

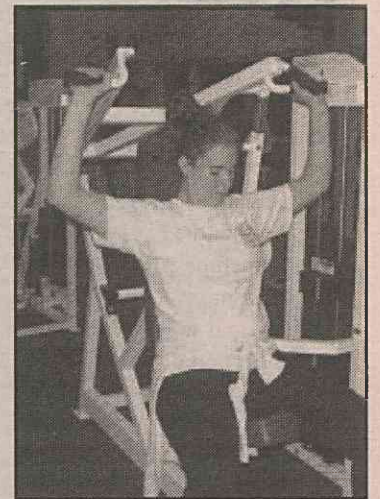
said. "We would rather people wipe the machines off with their own towels rather than the same one over and over again."

According to Zimmer, machines are cleaned once every two hours or each time there is a change in shifts at the fitness center.

Regardless of how one is infected, there are several ways in which to deal with the condition. If scratched, molluscum can become infected with bacteria and spread, according to the McKinley Health Center at the University of Illinois. Infected individuals should also avoid shaving contaminated areas.

While treatment is done for aesthetic reasons, it also prevents the spread of the virus, which can take anywhere from six months to five years to go away without treatment, according to the American Academy of Dermatology. A curette, a sharp spoon-shaped instrument, can be used to remove centers. Lesions can be treated with liquid nitrogen or nitrous oxide.

Additional treatments include electrocautery, an electric needle, or a daily application of a topical retinoid cream or gel, with a topi-



Amy Cowen / Assistant Photo Editor

*Lindsay Adam, like most students on campus, works out in the gym with no warning of the disease.*

cal immune modifier or antiviral medication. Multiple treatments may be needed every three to six weeks until growths go away independently. Treatment can lead to minimal scarring.

Molluscums can return, but according to the American Academy of Dermatology, new drugs are being developed to treat the viral infection.

## ECOnference: Students, learning and acting

**Dana Gowland**

**Lauren Farrell**

*Reporter*

On Oct. 19-21, more than 1,500 students and activists gathered at George Washington University to network and learn about environmental issues at a convention sponsored by ecopledge.com. Workshops, training sessions and speakers such as Jim Hightower and Congressman Earl Blumenuer of Oregon empowered students to return to their campuses and spread the word of the latest environmental campaigns and issues. Over fifty organizations attended, including Greenpeace, the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life, Sierra Club, the State PIRG's, and Alaska Coalition.

Topics presented ranged from

environmental racism to animal rights to nontoxic tampons. Even closer to home for Elon students, is the "Tree Free Campus" campaign sponsored by Free the Planet! and Rainforest Action Network. It is an effort to get all college campuses nationwide to become "tree free," meaning no virgin wood products are used. All North Carolina State schools currently use 100% recycled paper and hopefully Elon will follow suite and begin to use recycled paper products as well. For more information about this campaign go to [www.freetheplanet.org](http://www.freetheplanet.org) or [www.ran.org](http://www.ran.org). If you are concerned about environmental issues and policies and want to learn more contact Dana Gowland at [dgowland@elon.edu](mailto:dgowland@elon.edu) or Lauren Farrell at [farrl8e0@elon.edu](mailto:farrl8e0@elon.edu).

# Jesus

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Who conquered,  
not with sword, but through  
His own death, burial and resurrection?*

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**Sponsored by Antioch Community Church, J. Mark Fox (421-6532)**