

Doctors tell all about bodies, brains and bugs

Since the York administration has closed down the health clinics on both campuses, we're offering you our *Excal* clinic, free of charge.

We've found some local public health experts and asked them some of the burning questions students frequently ask about bodies, brains and bugs.

If you have questions of your own, send them to *Excalibur* at 420 Student Centre. It's no substitute for a visit to your doctor, but it's a good cure for curiosity.

•Are cockroaches worse for you than pesticides? My apartment is filled with cockroaches, and I'm not sure if I should fumigate.

Cockroaches pose a health hazard because they physically transmit bacteria, which in turn can cause disease. Cockroach infestations provoke allergic reactions in people who are allergic to their secretions. For others, cockroaches pose another health risk: distress, embarrassment or anxiety.

The war against cockroaches can be fought in many ways. The Ministry of the Environment licences exterminators and approves products to tackle the problem properly. Pest control firms will advise you to empty kitchen cupboards and remove all dishes so food and food surfaces are not contaminated when they spray.

If you don't want to use chemicals, some across-the-counter remedies at the hardware store may have some effect. Good housekeeping helps, so clean up food or water spills, keep food in airtight containers and remove garbage daily. Seal cracks and crevices, especially along counters and under sinks, to prevent roaches from entering and breeding.

Chinese chalk is not recommended because it's a toxic and illegal substance that is harmful to you and your pets.

•I'm one of those "leave everything till the last minute" people. Sometimes when I pull an all-nighter, I feel fine the next day. Sometimes, I feel horrible. Is there any way to make sure I don't feel awful? Please don't tell me to get a good night's sleep, because that won't happen.

There's always a cost attached to going without sleep—it's just a matter of when you pay the price. Your body needs sleep to recharge itself. Short naps are better than no sleep at all. But proper rest comes from uninterrupted, deep sleep.

Don't make an all-nighter harder on your body by drinking a ton of coffee to stay awake. Deep breathing exercises, fresh air, good food and walking around once an hour will do more to keep you alert with fewer side effects the day after.

Can I get venereal disease without having intercourse? I am moving into residence and I am concerned about catching something in the common washroom. How can I protect myself?

Sexually transmitted diseases (previously called venereal diseases), including AIDS and syphilis, are usually spread by sexual contact—including oral and anal sex—because germs travel with semen, vaginal fluids and blood.

Some STDs are spread from skin to skin or skin to mucous membrane contact, such as genital warts and herpes.

You usually cannot catch STDs from casual contact with objects such as toilets or showers.



•Are there any natural remedies for menstrual cramps?

Regular exercise, even during your period, a hot water bottle applied to the lower back or stomach and lower back massages can all help. If the problem persists, consult your doctor.

•My sister says you can get really run down at university. She suggested I take vitamins. What kinds should I take?

There's no cheaper or faster way to get the nutrients you need than eating the right foods on a regular basis. Vitamin supplements can't provide all your nutritional needs, and are more expensive than buying fresh fruit, vegetables, dairy products, bread and cereals.

•I'm pretty sure my roommate is anorexic. She won't eat in front of me. She is really skinny, but she thinks she is fat. I've tried to make her eat by bringing home things she likes. Am I doing the right thing?

Feed your friend information on eating disorders rather than tempting her with treats. Eating disorder clinics at North York's Branson Hospital and Toronto General Hospital provide information and counselling. Talking to her and helping her find out how and where to get help will have more effect in the long run. First, she has to want your help.

•The past few times I've been drunk I've blacked out. I can't even remember how I got home last night. I don't think I'm drinking any more than I used to, and I only drink beer. Does this mean I have a drinking problem?

If you're blacking out and can't remember things, you have a problem, no matter what you had to drink. Beer is no less addictive or harmful than liquor if you have too much. One beer has the same punch as one 1.5-oz mixed drink or a six-oz glass of wine.

You should look at why you drink to the point of blacking out. You might call the Addiction Research Foundation at 595-6032 for help.

•I use cocaine occasionally, but only at parties—no more than once a month. How risky is this?

Any cocaine use is a risk. Sniffing cocaine is like playing Russian roulette. You can take it repeatedly and appear healthy, but one bad experience can end the game for good. Even elite athletes have dropped dead from a heart attack because of cocaine use.

The Addiction Research Foundation says you can't tell how predisposed you are to addiction or congenital problems like aneurysms that could be a deadly combination with cocaine. The ARF provides counselling on the phone or in person.

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