With our grocery and liquor stores still open for business, purchasing alcohol may seem like a no-brainer to cope with the current isolation and social distancing. The Comprehensive Alcohol and Other Drug program wants to remind our OU community of alcohol’s impact on the immune system considering COVID-19’s current effects on public health.

What we should all keep in mind if we choose to use alcohol to cope with the current situation...

- Alcohol first enters the GI system where it’s absorbed into the bloodstream, but also affects the structure and integrity of the GI tract by altering the numbers and relative abundances of microbes in the gut microbiome needed for normal gut function.
- These intestinal microbes communicate with our immune system to positively affect the maturation and function of the immune system, but alcohol disrupts both this important communication and gut barrier function, facilitating leakage of microbes into blood circulation.
- Bacterial leakage activates the innate immune system in the liver, triggering inflammation that underlies ALD (Alcohol Liver Disease).
- Alcohol consumption also damages white blood cells and T cells, which control antibody responses, activate innate immune cells, and lyse target cells.

And if that wasn’t enough....

- Alcohol consumption has been linked to pulmonary diseases, including tuberculosis, respiratory virus, and ARDS (Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome) due to the fact that alcohol disrupts ciliary function in the upper airways, impairs the function of immune cells, and weakens the barrier function of the epithelia in the lower airways.

If you are struggling with substance use, you can still make appointments with the University Counseling Center’s Licensed Alcohol and Drug Counselor

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KYE LEOUEF, MA | COMPREHENSIVE ALCOHOL PROGRAM COORDINATOR
As we’ve transitioned to online classes and you’re encouraged to engage in social distancing, you may find yourself faced with new or increased academic, financial and health stress and anxiety. It may be that you simply have more time on your hands now that you are no longer engaged in Student Life/extracurricular activities. In whatever combination of situations you find yourself, it is important that you cope by way of healthy strategies that do not compromise your immune system. As you have likely seen in the news, COVID-19 can impact old and young alike, but you may not know that vaping and cigarette use increase your vulnerabilities due to the fact that they reduce lung health and your body’s ability to fight infection.

We’re fully aware of the effects cigarettes have on our health. Researchers are still unsure of the long-term effects of vaping, but there is evidence of immediate and intermediate lung damage. When factoring in COVID-19 as a respiratory illness that in and of itself can lead to permanent diminished lung capacity, the combination of COVID-19 with either cigarette use or vaping could possibly leave younger Covid-19 patients with severe and permanent lung damage.

For more information on COVID-19’s relation to cigarette and vaping use, visit the links on our website. To help meet your vaping and tobacco cessation needs, our Quit Smart program has moved to an online format. Please contact us for details.

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