

## Binge pill popping has great dangers, doctor warns



Here's to a happy, healthy Christmas!

Byron Bay GP Adam Osborne is deeply concerned about the increasing number of young people he is seeing in the hospital emergency department who have binged on designer drugs.

"Young people getting really drunk and marijuana paranoia is not a new thing, but people are adding designer drugs to the mix," Dr Osborne said.

"It has been an issue more and more in Byron Bay the last 18 months to two years – when you get concentrated partying of young people who come with the intention of partying hard for a few days."

At this year's Splendour in the Grass for example, two or three presentations to the hospital were of people who had taken ecstasy or speed or both on top of considerable amounts of alcohol and not enough proper food. What is more, Dr Osborne says, many young people are taking, not just one tablet, but two, three, four and more, with no understanding of the cumulative effects of the drugs in their bodies.

"People who come in here really ill have absolutely no idea on the limits of what they can take. Perhaps in the male's case



Dr Adam Osborne

it's a bravado thing, but certainly the pressure seems to be on to keep drinking, to take another ecstasy and another and another."

Combined with dehydration, lack of food and sleep, taking several ecstasy over time seems to increase the toxicity, Dr Osborne says.

"And yet young people are using designer drugs like they would have several drinks one after another. There needs to be messages out in the community that these drugs are not harmless and that they have toxic effects that accumulate the more they are taken, result-

ing in sometimes life threatening consequences."

If someone who has taken drugs becomes unwell, Dr Osborne urges those who are with the person to call an ambulance immediately or to take them to the nearest hospital emergency department.

"There have been tragic cases of people who have died because their friends were afraid to call for help. Some young people are worried that the police are also called, but the police do not get involved in these medical emergencies."

Christmas is a special time for children to enjoy time with family and friends. But it can often be a stressful and unhealthy time for all our bodies. Children often over-eat at Christmas and then feel unwell. Many children don't like traditional Christmas food and dislike even more the traditional Christmas snooze time enjoyed by so many adults.

Here are some tips that might help make your children's Christmas Day more enjoyable and better for their bodies.

### CHRISTMAS DAY ACTIVITIES

Go for a walk, or play a ball game such as family cricket, volleyball, soccer, badminton etc. during the afternoon. Have a light evening meal if you had a big lunch or vice versa. Plan your celebrations so that you are not trying to do Christmas with two families on one day. Try to avoid driving when tired.

### SAFETY FIRST

The last place you will want to be at Christmas is at the hospital emergency department. Injuries happen because everyone is busy and excited and there may be no one to supervise the children. If you are giving a present that will require some new skills, plan for someone (Mum, Dad, Grandpa, Aunt etc) to put aside some time to supervise the activity.

Roster at least one adult at a time to supervise children in pools. Keep any toys with small parts or dangerous bits out of reach of young children. Put the Christmas tree ornaments and lights where toddlers can't get at them.

### GIFTS FOR CHILDREN

Buy toys that encourage children to be physically active (in Australia the level of childhood obesity is rising dramatically).

Make sure toys and other gifts are suitable for the age of your child (often marked on the toy) and are safe.

Check the presents before you wrap them to make sure all the parts (including batteries) are there. Once toys are opened, ensure

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*For parents with children from newborn to around one year of age who are having difficulties, or require further support with: feeding (breast, weaning, bottle, solids); unsettled behaviour and related sleeping patterns; adjustment to parenthood issues for the family; postnatal distress; or parentcraft issues.*

**ASK YOUR GP FOR A REFERRAL.**

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Here's to a healthy Christmas

plastic wrappings are out of babies' and toddlers' reach.

Try to give one toy that the child can use immediately, rather than having a number of toys that need assembling or have detailed instructions.

For lasting value, think of the play value of the toy - how many different ways can the toy be used? Many battery operated toys or toys that have a limited function can quickly become boring.

Don't buy pets for Christmas. The novelty will soon wear off but you will need to care for the pet for up to 20 years. Small children (under five) may not be able to understand how to handle them.

Remember that the best present you can give children is your time. Children, especially young children, do not need or want a lot of expensive presents, but they do want time with you. Consider buying something that you and your child can play together.

#### ENJOY SIMPLE MEALS

Cold meat and salads and fruit are just as healthy as cooked meals and save a lot of energy in cooking and washing up. Every meal does not have to have meat. Salads with cheese, eggs, canned fish or canned beans are just as healthy.

#### ENJOY SOME TIME ALONE

If you plan in an hour or so each day to do your own thing - read your own book or walk by yourself - you will be a much more relaxed parent.

#### COMBINE CHILDREN

Arrange it so your children have their friends over one day and then another day they go to their friends' homes. This gives all parents a break and on the day you have all the children they are often happy to do things with each other. It means also that the days when you have your children to yourself you have more energy to enjoy them.

#### DOUBLE UP WITH OTHER PARENTS

Spend time with your friends and their children. The children will enjoy playing together and you will have the companionship of another adult. Plan trips to the beach or to the rainforest to cool down, have a picnic in the park, visit the local library and see what special holiday activities they have planned.

*Merry Christmas everyone!*

# Younger people get chronic lung disease too

Nothing else matters if you can't breathe. About one in 10 people over 45 years of age in the Northern Rivers are sufferers of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). As COPD is a slow, progressive disease, many people may not know they have it until significant breathing problems begin to dominate their lives.

"People even in their 40s and 50s may have been developing COPD for many years beforehand," said Cecily Barrack, the

respiratory coordinator for the Priority Health Care Program at the Northern Rivers Division of General Practice.

"Early symptoms can often be ignored, but the disease progresses slowly and eventually the sufferer may find it difficult or impossible to walk even a few steps. A person with any changes to their ease of breathing and a history of prolonged exposure to cigarette smoke or other irritants may have COPD and should see their GP."

Cecily coordinates local pulmonary rehabilitation programs across the region that have proven to be effective in improving the quality of life of people with moderate to severe COPD where breathlessness is a daily issue. The gentle exercise and education programs slow the progress of the disease, relieve symptoms, improve exercise tolerance and ability to self manage and reduce the number of days spent in hospital.

Cheryle Winkler (56), from Goonellabah, reckons her COPD started in her late 30s, when she remembers having occasional breathlessness, although she was not diagnosed until her early 50s. Her condition has escalated in the last 18 months and is quite debilitating. Cheryle says she has found the rehab program very useful.

"I am only 56. Some days I feel 156. It's horrible. I don't do things like I used to. I



Steve Sawtell (46) from South Lismore

don't go shopping or anything, although I'm starting to do that sort of thing again since starting the program."

Another younger patient who has benefited from the pulmonary rehabilitation program is Steve Sawtell (46) from South Lismore. Steve is an ex-smoker who had a heart attack in June 2002 and was referred to the program by his cardiologist. "I feel I'm a lot better," Steve said. "The program has helped me to try and breathe. I tend to forget to breathe when

I'm doing activities."

For those who already have COPD, or who may be at risk of COPD, getting support from GPs, pharmacists, friends and family to quit smoking is the single most beneficial action an individual can take to prevent the progression of disability that occurs with this disease. Today there is so much proven assistance available to help individuals quit smoking that the chance of a successful quit attempt for each person can be doubled.

"As well as not smoking, reducing exposure to other airborne irritants such as sprays and chemicals in the home and workplace also prevents the disease's development and progression," Cecily says.

For more information about pulmonary rehabilitation courses available in the region, contact Cecily on 6622 4453.



SPIKE SAYS

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