



HOW TO GET THROUGH THE HOLIDAY WITHOUT...

Between the cocktails and beach umbrellas, the holiday season hides dangers – some minor and others serious. Here are smart ways to dodge them.
By Amanda Killick

In December, we tend to let go and stop worrying ... about work, problems and anything else stressful. Instead, we concentrate on relaxing, partying and getting our tans just right. But at the end of the year, some of the risks we face all year become greater, either because our guard is down or

because the party season brings its own set of hazards. Taking the sensible approach to having fun needn't threaten your pleasure principle, though. Follow these tips and you can party your way through the season without sacrificing your heart, health or safety.



'CONDOMS ARE ONLY 80%
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STD TRANSMISSION'

...HAVING A DRUNK-DRIVING ACCIDENT

According to statistics from Arrive Alive, an average of 10 000 people die each year on South Africa's roads. Half of those deaths are caused by drunk drivers and 70% of adult pedestrians killed are drunk at the time of the accident. According to Arrive Alive spokesperson Ntatu Letebele, research shows that alcohol affects your vision, impairs your judgment and affects your reaction time. So even if you're at the legal limit (50mg of alcohol per 100ml of blood), you're still five times as likely to be in an accident than if you are sober.

1 PLAN AHEAD Letebele suggests having a plan in place next time you go out to a party or host one of your own. 'If you've been drinking, don't decide to walk home,' he says. 'Instead, let a sober friend drive you, call a taxi or arrange to stay the night.' If the party's at your house, encourage your guests to leave their cars at home and use a local taxi service instead, or suggest a designated-driver system. If all else fails, offer to pay for their taxi rides home or allow them to stay over.

2 DON'T RELY ON SELF-TESTING Home breathalyzer tests are available from pharmacies, but self-testing before you leave a party may not be reliable. And trying to sober up by drinking strong coffee or energy drinks, or having a cold shower won't help. It only takes 15 minutes for alcohol to be absorbed into your bloodstream but it can take up to a day to get it out of your system, to acceptable driving levels.

3 STAY SAFE WHEN DRINKING Sensible hosts serve the alcohol, rather than letting guests help themselves. They also have nonalcoholic drinks and food available at all times. If you're planning activities for your guests, choose ones that don't require a lot of skill and won't put them in danger – so don't go quad biking, swimming, diving or go-karting, for example.

...CONTRACTING AN STD

During party season, your chances of contracting HIV or another sexually transmitted disease (STD) increase. And when you factor in the judgment-impairing effects of alcohol and other stimulants, the risk can increase further. The list of STDs hasn't really changed, says Johannesburg gynaecologist Dr Haidra Dahms. The culprits remain chlamydia, herpes, gonorrhoea, syphilis, HIV and the human papilloma virus, certain strains of which are thought to cause cervical cancer. Many of these STDs don't present symptoms early on and can only be diagnosed via blood tests, smears or semen analysis.

1 DON'T SLEEP AROUND 'The only sure way to protect yourself from STDs and HIV is by abstaining from sex altogether,' says Dahms. One-night stands are high-risk, so be discerning about who you choose to sleep with and limit your number of sexual partners. Getting tested together sounds like the solution but remember that if you go to the same doctor for tests, that doctor won't be able to tell you your partner's results. Honesty and trust are major issues.

2 BE ON ALCOHOL ALERT You need to be able to make good judgment calls if you suspect that an encounter is heading for something more, so watch your alcohol consumption.

3 BE JUDGMENTAL Once the kit comes off, take note of anything unusual that might suggest an STD. Blisters, warts, scabs or open wounds in his genital area (or around his mouth) are deal-breakers and it's up to you to stop proceedings at any point. Don't continue if you suspect your health is at risk.

4 DON'T HAVE UNPROTECTED SEX 'Condoms are only 80% effective in preventing pregnancy and STD transmission,' says Dahms. 'A number of young women contract STDs via oral and anal sex because they mistakenly think that it's a safer alternative to unprotected vaginal penetration. If you swap bodily fluids, you're at risk.'

5 BUST THE BLUSHING 'If you suspect you've been exposed to STDs or HIV, it's vital to get tested,' says Dahms. If you can't face going to a clinic, try one of Adcock Ingram's range of effective home-testing kits for, among other things, various STDs, HIV, drug use and pregnancy, says Dahms. Remember there's a window period, so if you test negative, it may be advisable to retest yourself six weeks after exposure. If you test positive, seek medical help as soon as possible. □

...PUTTING ON TOO MANY EXTRA KILOS

'With so much good food and drink around at Christmas time, I always start the New Year at least five kilos heavier,' confesses Zedwa Shabalala, a 27-year-old public-relations officer from Johannesburg. But it doesn't have to be that way. You can keep the extra kilos off.

1 SNACK OFTEN 'Having a few small meals throughout the day keeps blood-sugar levels stable,' says Johannesburg dietitian Pippa Manicom. In your beach bag, stash a small container of nuts and mixed seeds, bottled water, dried mango and blitting for an instant energy boost.

2 STICK TO YOUR ROUTINE Even though you're on holiday, 'watch your portion size, keep exercising even if it's only three times a week instead of five, and make sensible food choices', says Manicom.

3 BE A PARTY PLANNER, NOT A PARTY POOPER 'Navigating a buffet table is easy,' says Manicom. 'Limit yourself to one plateful of food and avoid things such as pastries, samosas, gravies or anything coated in breadcrumbs, as they are high-fat items.' And you don't have to bypass the chocolate fountain if you curb your craving by allowing yourself a couple of chocolate-dipped fruit skewers.

4 CHOOSE THE RIGHT BOOZE Alcohol is more difficult to monitor, especially if there are waiters doing the rounds topping up glasses, and you can easily lose track of how much you've had. Manicom says, 'Avoid cocktails and go for low-kilojoule options such as a white-wine spritzer or a single shot of spirits with a diet mixer.'

'AVOID COCKTAILS AND GO FOR LOW-KILOJOULE OPTIONS SUCH AS A WHITE-WINE SPRITZER'

...GETTING YOUR HEART BROKEN BY A HOLIDAY FLING

It's taken Capetonian Undi Makoro, a 26-year-old property consultant, a year to bounce back from her holiday romance. 'He seemed perfect and so did the relationship,' she says. That was her first mistake, says Johannesburg relationship expert Hanlie Raath. 'Holiday flings are by nature temporary, so you're being unfair to yourself if you think this is the kind of relationship that will last forever.'

1 SEE IT FOR WHAT IT IS Raath says you both need to go into the relationship with a clear agreement – you like each other, you're together to have a little fun and there's no expectation that something more will happen once the holiday's over, especially if you live in different cities. She says, 'The likelihood of keeping the relationship alive is very small.'

2 DON'T GET TOO ATTACHED 'Enjoy each other and the experience without getting emotionally invested,' says Raath. 'Keep your interaction playful – the moment it becomes too serious, the fling loses its magic.'

3 ADJUST YOUR PERSPECTIVE If you're looking to find your soul mate or a committed relationship, steer clear of the holiday romance altogether – you will end up hurt. Raath suggests: 'Enjoy the spontaneity. Then go back to living your normal life when you get home. If he's falling for you, he'll make sure to keep the contact going – and if it develops into something more, celebrate!'

...GETTING ATTACKED OR RAPED AT A PARTY

Amy*, 24, was attacked at a house party while on holiday in KwaZulu-Natal last Christmas. She was drunk and was raped by two guys she knew only vaguely from university. 'I was so out of it, I couldn't fight them off,' she says. Sanette Smit, COSMO's self-defence expert, says this kind of situation can often be avoided.

1 DRESS CLEVERLY 'It's probably the last thing on your mind but make sure that the clothes you choose don't limit your movements, should an attack happen,' says Smit. Ask yourself questions such as, 'If I need to run, can I do it in these shoes?'

2 WATCH YOUR ALCOHOL INTAKE 'You need to be able to make the best decisions to protect yourself,' says Smit. 'Don't accept any drinks. Instead, buy your own, watch them being poured and don't leave them unattended, as someone could spike them.'

3 DON'T LET YOURSELF BECOME ISOLATED 'If you go to a party with a group, stay together and watch out for one another,' Smit says. If a guy you've just met suggests you go outside to talk, take a friend along too – you never know what may happen once you get there. And if his motives are friendly, he won't mind the extra company.'

4 KEEP CASH HANDY Smit says it's important to have cash on you, not only to pay your way but also to be able to make a phone call for help. 'Having a cellphone sometimes isn't enough because batteries go flat, airtime runs out or it may get taken from you.'

5 RELY ON YOURSELF, THEN ON WHAT YOU HAVE 'Don't rely on friends or fellow partygoers to help you during an attack – use whatever you have to get yourself out of the situation,' says Smit. Scratch, bite, punch, knee and kick first – then use objects such as the heel of your shoe, your car keys or pepper spray if you have it. >

*NAME HAS BEEN CHANGED