

The pill: now the morning after?

Q. What is the "morning-after pill"? How does it work? What are the risks?

A. One of the most carefully guarded secrets of medicine is that the morning-after pill is the

humble birth control pill or oral contraceptive taken in higher than normal doses. As most people know, birth control pills, a combination of the female sex hormone estrogen and the

pregnancy hormone progesterone, are very effective contraceptives when taken daily. What most people don't know is that birth control pills can also work after the fact when taken in high doses twelve hours apart within 72 hours of (whoops) unprotected sex. Just like a good lawyer or a great excuse, the morning-after pill lets you screw up royally without suffering all the messy consequences.

How does it work? Whether used daily (as they're intended) or as a morning-after pill, oral contraceptives prevent pregnancy in three ways:

1. During a normal pregnancy, high levels of estrogen and progesterone suppress ovulation or release of an unfertilized egg from the ovaries, an evolutionary "enough already!" adaptation which mercifully prevents pregnant women from getting more pregnant. Birth control pills trick the body into thinking it's already pregnant, and prevent pregnancy in a similar manner.

2. Progesterone makes the cervical mucus thick and inelastic, creating what's known as the cervical mucus barrier. In the first half of a normal menstrual cycle, the ovaries produce estrogen only. Under its influence, the cervical mucus acts like a crystal clear and

stretchy sperm escalator heading straight for the womb. After ovulation, with birth control pills or during pregnancy, progesterone kicks in and makes the cervical mucus impenetrable to all but the most intrepid sperm. The cervical mucus barrier is another way birth control pills prevent pregnancy.

3. Progesterone makes the lining of the uterus inhospitable to a fertilized egg and may prevent it from attaching or implanting in the uterus. Even if ovulation does occur and a hard-headed sperm has bludgeoned its way through the cervical mucus barrier and fertilized the lady-in-waiting, pregnancy still might not occur. Without a nesting site, whether it be a properly primed uterus or Arnold Schwarzenegger's abdomen, an embryo soon shrivels and dies.

Risks of the morning-after pill include nausea and vomiting, which are very common because of the high doses of estrogen. It may trigger the mother of all migraines in women who are susceptible to this type of headache. Fortunately, the morning-after pill doesn't cause weight gain and acne like Depo-provera shots can, and seldom causes serious problems like blood clots and strokes which are associated with regular use of

birth control pills.

Before you throw caution, condoms and other birth control devices to the wind, keep in mind that the morning-after pill is not a particularly reliable method of birth. In fact the biggest risk of the morning-after pill is pregnancy. If you take it within 24 hours of the dirty deed, it's only 75 percent effective. By 72 hours, its effectiveness dwindles to 50 percent, and beyond that, it's essentially worthless. By comparison, other hormonal methods of contraception, such as Depo-provera or conventional use of the Pill, are 99 percent effective. Even condoms have a better track record than that, and the only time they cause nausea is when you come across a used one in your purse or pocket.

The take-home message is that the morning-after pill is a poor substitute for birth control or self-control. Don't be like the guy who told me, "We accidentally had sex last night, and my girlfriend needs the morning-after pill."

by Anne Phelan-Adams, M.D. 1995 Tribune Media Services, Inc.

Kandinsky Trio

by Joe Ryan
Collegian Staff

Tuesday's Wintergarden performance of the Kandinsky Trio was a big success, drawing a full house of Penn State Alumni and the general public. The Trio performed as part of the Music At Noon series here at Behrend.

The Trio met in college at the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston. They feel that their music is a combination of folk music and storytelling with the traditional classical music. They received the prestigious NEA Meet the Composer grant in 1994.

Founded in 1987, the Kandinsky Trio has quickly established itself as one of America's finest chamber ensembles. The Trio has received

numerous awards and honors and has appeared on both television and radio broadcasts. The Kandinsky Trio is: Elizabeth Bachelder on piano, Alan Weinstein on cello, and Benedict Goodfriend on violin. They were accompanied by the storyteller Connie Regan-Blake, who told a story she wrote about a blacksmith. The trio is also occasionally accompanied by Mike Reid, an All-Pro football player with the Cincinnati Bengals and former Penn State player. Mike composed the music to accompany the story.

In all, the afternoon performance was a big success. One such audience member from Harrisburg declared it "A marvelous show." All in attendance seemed to enjoy the performance by the Kandinsky Trio.

Cheap seats at Bleachers

by Colette Rethage & Eddie Edwards
Collegian Staff

The next stop on the bar tour is at Bleachers, located downtown on 723 French Street. It is

owned and operated by Jim Zank, or "Jimmy Z" as regulars of his other bar "the Pub" would know him as.

The atmosphere is a relaxed and friendly one. The bartenders are great, too. Sarah Melchoirre, a senior here at Behrend, is employed as a bartender there. When I asked her to describe the place, she said, "There's not a bunch of idiot freaks dancing and pelvic thrusting - it's a bar where you can just relax and hang out."

The crowd is usually mixed because Bleachers is located right near the Stadium and Civic Center. People usually flock in after concerts, baseball, and hockey games. In the summer, Bleachers is a popular hangout of the Erie Seawolves. On the weekends Bleachers caters to a younger crowd of college students.

The menu offers your typical bar food, and Sarah says "it's great." The fried foods include cheese sticks, wings, chicken fingers, and fries. The sandwiches offered include chicken parmesan, vegetarian, and

such specials as The "Big Bambino", which is a whole loaf of Italian bread filled with roast beef, turkey, ham, cheese, and loaded with toppings. Another menu option includes a variety of salads, such as steak, taco, chicken, and antipasto.

Bleachers, owned by Jim Zank, is located on 723 French Street. It is near the Stadium and the Civic Center.

Bleachers frequently has giveaways with Jet 102 FM. This Saturday they will be having a Halloween party where they will be giving away Green Day tickets. So put on your best costume and head over to Bleachers for some fun. And make sure you say hello to Sarah when you're there!

Murder One: Bochco's newest hit on television

by Adria Kovaly
Collegian Staff

In the spirit of the great courtroom dramas comes "Murder One", a new show for the fall season produced by Steven Bochco.

The continuous story line centers around the murder case of Jessica Costello, a fifteen year old found dead in her sister's apartment. The prime suspect is Neil Avedon (Jason Gedrick), a rising movie star who was with Jessica before she died.

Avedon is being represented by Ted Hoffman (Daniel Benzali), the head of a law firm who really knows his stuff. Hoffman also represented the original suspect, philanthropist Richard Cross (Stanley Tucci), who, as evidence begins to emerge, is looking ever

more guilty.

Opposing Hoffman is Detective Polson (Dylan Baker), who has been repeatedly humbled by the lawyer's stunning work, and the District Attorney (Barbara Bosson), who is representing "the people" in the trial.

Hoffman is assisted by his four associates. Every week Bochco gives us a chance to see how they operate by showing each one in their own trial situations.


"Murder One" is a superbly written show, even though the jargon is sometimes hard to follow. The plot is continuous, but not monotonous, so plan on catching it every week. If you don't, you'll be guilty of missing a great show.

"Murder One" airs Thursday nights on ABC, from 10 to 11 p.m.

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