

STUDENT BODY

a health issues magazine

Arab... and gay???

أنا عربي و لوطي

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MEN FACE PRESSURE TO BE HOT AND IN SHAPE

"At my new gym, just outside the borders of the McGill ghetto, I'm the skinny guy with no muscles. The gym is packed with big beefy guys who grunt when they lift heavy weights. Meanwhile I just keep wondering if I'll ever get big pecs and nice pipes."

Carlos, a U4 Management student, hired one of the gym's personal trainers and started a new training program. "All the fitness mags talk about getting ripped in 12 weeks. I was working out like 4-5 times a week for 6 months and wasn't seeing significant results," he said.

When he asked his trainer why, his trainer told him **'they're all on steroids.'** "He told me that if I wanted to look like them without working out 4 hours a day, I had to take steroids."

Anabolic steroids, a synthetic version of the male hormone, testosterone, are ingested to improve performance and enhance appearance. They have a variety of serious side effects from 'roid rage' and liver damage to impotence.

Steroid use is part of the flip side of body image disorders. Male body image -- especially in ultra fashion-oriented Montreal -- is a big issue. In one body image study, 45% of guys were found to be unsatisfied with their physiques (compared with 55% of women).

Men are spending countless hours at the gym, taking food supplements and diet aids, and at the extreme using anabolic steroids to

push the limits of their physiques. Masculinity is being defined by a 'six pack' and huge muscles.

The result has been an increase in eating disorders (anorexia and bulimia) as well as body dysmorphia. Body dysmorphic disorder is characterized by a person's extreme discontent with some aspect of his appearance. Men with the condition believe they are too small and "puny" even though they may be muscular and well-built.

As study published in the British Medical Journal estimates that triple the number of men suffer from body dysmorphic disorder now compared to 25 years ago.

"Sounds cliché" said Carlos, "but I just decided to give up focussing on my body parts and instead put my effort into what I'm passionate about in life - my interests, my friends, my studies. So much more satisfying. Self-worth comes from living a full life, not from big biceps."

According to Statistics Canada 2004 report, 23% of Canadians are obese, up from 14% in 1979. Canadians have become increasingly concerned with losing weight and keeping it off. But with so many weight loss methods available, what is the most effective way to shed pounds? **According to a recent Stanford University study published in the Journal of American Medical Association, the Atkins diet trumped four other popular methods including the Zone, Ornish and 'LEARN program.**

The researchers studied 311 premenopausal women who were obese or overweight, averaging almost 190 pounds. At the end of the 12 month study period, women on the Atkins lost the most weight - an average of 10 pounds - versus 3.5 lbs for the Zone, 5 lbs for the Ornish, and 6 lbs for women on the LEARN program.

But according to Sylvia Santosa, who just completed her PhD in diet and nutrition at McGill's MacDonald Campus, there are dangers in drawing conclusions from only one research study. "A closer look at the cited article in JAMA reveals that mean weight loss achieved over the 12 months was only low to modest" says Santosa. "Even at a 10 pound per person loss on the Atkins, this represented only about 5 % of the average participant's starting weight. This suggests that participants did not adequately follow the dietary principles in these diets. If the participants did not follow the diets appropriately, it is difficult to draw conclusions based on these diets" she notes.

The article points out that higher levels of good cholesterol were seen with weight loss through the Atkins diet. However, a question that inevitably arises is whether weight loss itself affect changes in cholesterol levels? Just losing weight would likely cause cardioprotective changes in cholesterol levels regardless of diet. The authors did not explain the specific relationship between cholesterol and weight loss.

It should be noted that there were no differences in the amount of body fat loss and waist to hip ratio, changes which are also related to increased risk of cardiovascular disease and diabetes.

So far, the best and safest way to achieve weight loss is to follow the good old tried and tested changes in lifestyle habits, which includes a healthy diet and moderate exercise.

4 keys to maintaining a healthy body weight >>>

- 1 Choose high fiber foods such as fruits, and vegetables more often
- 2 Exercise moderately at least 3 times a week
- 3 Lower your consumption of highly processed 'junk' foods (chips, pop) which are often higher in fat and salt
- 4 When eating out, choose dishes with more vegetables and ask for sauces on the side



MMMM! FRIED BACON AND EGGS ARE ALL GOOD WHEN YOU'RE ON THE ATKINS DIET

Araband Gay??

When Al-Hussein, the son of a wealthy Jordanian politician, fell totally in love with the head of Jordan's national judo team, he separated from his wife and built a house on the outskirts of Amman to discreetly meet his lover. Not long after, Al-Hussein's younger brother caught the two men kissing. The brother threw Mr. Hussein down the stairs, breaking his leg. Three months later while recovering in hospital, his brother shot him when Mr. Hussein's lover came to visit.

Shrouded in shame and secrecy, homosexuality is one of the biggest taboos in modern Arab societies. For Arab men, individual sexual behaviour affects the social standing of the entire extended family: to be gay and Arab is an affront to the 'honour' of the family. Homosexuality is perceived as either mental illness or deviant behaviour - forcing young gay Arabs underground and into isolation.

According to Brian Whitaker in his groundbreaking book *Unspeakable Love: Gay and Lesbian Life in the Middle East*, tradition and family honour keep homosexuality in the dark. People speak of 'shameful acts' and 'deviant behaviour' and those who feel urges towards the same sex are often forced to lead a dual life: one of the good son on one hand, and secret gay sex on the other. Finding love, coming out, and forming long term relationships is usually out of the question. *Unspeakable Love* paints a picture of people who live secretive, fearful lives struggling to fit into traditional arab society.

"Tradition and family honour keep homosexuality hidden and in the dark"

Al-Hussein fled Jordan and applied for refugee status in Canada. He left everything behind - his family, a 20 year career and all his assets (which he signed over to the same brother who shot him). He now resides in Toronto and works with a support group for gay Muslims - Salaam Canada. (www.salaamcanada.com)

"I don't approve of what my brother did," says Al-Hussein, "but I understand why he did it. It was about preserving the family's honour."

Gay & Arab..... at McGill

Profile: Nour

Hometown: Beirut, Lebanon

Major: U4 Electrical Engineering (McGill)

Sexual Identity: Gay

Style: Trendy

Restaurant: Saloon

Music: Hip/Hop, French oldies

Dream Boyfriend: He'll be tall, blond, smart as can be, and he'll make me laugh all day everyday!

Student Body: *Why is it so taboo to be gay in the Middle East? Is it for religious reasons?*

Nour: Being gay is considered a perversion. A gay Arab is considered to be the wrong version of what a real human is supposed to be. The Arab world happens to be the bottleneck of organized religions where Judaism, Christianity and Islam all started. All the religions have negative views towards homosexuality, and to live in that environment you basically have to conform.

Student Body: What is the standard reaction of family members if someone tries to 'come out'?

Nour: Coming out is not as common or as easy in the Middle East as it is in the Western world.

People grow up with the expectation of a traditional marriage and family. If you were to come out, family, friends and the community might take it personally. It would be more of a "how could you?" situation, and in most cases family won't be



easy on you. A family's honour goes hand-in-hand with the fulfillment of a cultural norm. To deviate from the norm is considered a disgrace since how you act reflects how you are

brought up. If you are outside that norm, people would attribute the "wrong" factor to the family.

Student Body: Did you find it difficult to meet other Arab guys who were interested in same-sex relationships when you were in Lebanon?

Nour: Meeting other gay Arab men was the least of my problems. We have hidden gay clubs in Lebanon. Well, "hidden" is an exaggeration. Society chooses to ignore them and big bribes are paid to minimize police raids. It is not a matter of meeting partners, but more of expressing yourself as a gay individual, in the physical, emotional and social senses.

S.B.: Is it true that Arab men who are the 'active' sexual partners frequently don't identify as being gay or bisexual?



Nour: Oh now we're talking!

A lot of gay Arabs do not admit that they are gay. They believe that by being "active", they are still playing the straight macho role. They refuse to do much intimate stuff, and sometimes don't even kiss. Some refer to themselves as bisexuals. Some just deny the fact they have sexual or emotional feelings towards other men. They are still trying to hold on to the cultural norm while fulfilling their fantasies. If you are a bottom, you can have your pick of the men, and if you're a top, oh you're competing!

S.B.: Do you dream of settling down with a partner in the Middle East?

Nour: I dream of settling down with a boyfriend in general. I feel like doing that in the Middle East might be risky and would not satisfy me. In the Middle East as I know it now, living with another man would mean living in the dark. We would not be able to be seen in public, would have no civil



rights as a couple and we would not be able to show much affection whether it is in the street or the comfort and safety of the lobby of our building. I am very affectionate, bubbly and

outgoing, and I simply would not be satisfied to hold all that in. I want to go out, wear what I want to wear and kiss who I want to kiss. I want to hold my boyfriend's hand, and shout out my love in the streets. I want to live in Canada.

Jimenez, Marina "Gay Jordanian Now 'Gloriously Free' in Canada" *The Globe & Mail* 20 May 2004.

Whitaker, Brian. *Unspeaking Love: Gay and Lesbian Life in the Middle East*, California Princeton Press; 1 edition (2006)



"I FEEL LIKE I'M LOSIN' IT DUDE! GET ME OUTTA HERE!!"

"My low point happened one night at a campus party" recalled Jason Siegal*. "I was looking around and seeing everyone having such a great time, and I felt totally dark and messed up. I couldn't even fake having fun. I had to get out. I jumped in a cab and went to my parents' place and collapsed on the floor crying uncontrollably. It was really scary."

"My depression had taken on a momentum of its own," said Jason. "I couldn't even fathom that this this was possible, and it just began to compound itself."

According to the Canadian Mental Health Association, depression is one of the most common mental health disorders . 7.9-8.6% of adults will have major depression during their lifetime in Canada (Health Canada). In 2003 alone there were over 11.6 million visits to doctors across Canada concerning depression.

9 signs of depression >>

- 1 Depressed Mood
- 2 Decreased Interest or Pleasure
- 3 Psychomotor Agitation or Retardation
- 4 Weight Changes
- 5 Sleep Disturbances
- 6 Fatigue
- 7 Feelings of Worthlessness or Guilt
- 8 "Brain Fog"
- 9 Thoughts of Death

Depression becomes an illness when common feelings related to personal failure or loss are severe and interfere with one's work or social life. Feelings can include worthlessness and self-blame, sadness, disappointment and emptiness.

Of the 9 signs of depression (see inset), a person usually must have 4 to 5 of them, with at least one of the first 2 to be diagnosed with depression.

For Jason Siegal, the slide began due to an acrimonious breakup with the 'love of his life.' He found out his girlfriend had cheated on him, and their relationship went downhill from there. He started to neglect his job because he couldn't concentrate, and because he was exhausted from not being able to sleep.

*not his real name

Depression, continued...

"The breakup hit me very hard," he said. "I had always succeeded in everything in life and all of a sudden I was failing. I felt like I failed in the relationship."

Key catalysts for Jason's recovery were counselling (www.mcgill.ca/counselling), moving home with his parents, and getting some spiritual help. According to Jason, "the Jewish High Holidays were really amazing for me. They allowed me to forgive myself and move forward. It's a theme throughout the High Holidays: that we are flawed human beings, and this allowed me to accept myself and move on."

According to the Canadian Mental Health Association, "depression is the most treatable of mental illnesses." Most people who get depressed are helped by psychological counselling and/or medication.

Jason's top 5 healing tips >>>

- 1 Be kind to yourself - this is not the time to add extra stressors.
- 2 Hang out with friends and family that you can trust and with whom you can be yourself.
- 3 Kids help-phone: call anytime day or night, they are there to listen 1-800-668-6868.
- 4 Go to McGill counselling to talk about your feelings www.mcgill.ca/counselling
- 5 Try to do the activities that you used to enjoy - even if you're not feeling up to it, sometimes going through the motions makes it easier.

"There is a lot of stigma surrounding seeing a counselor" said Jason. "People think it means you are defeated or there is something wrong with you. The thing about seeing my counsellor was that for an hour I could just freely associate and explore the types of feelings I was having. I discovered what was making me react to the situations in a particular way."

Final words of wisdom from Jason?? "The best advice that I can give someone who is depressed is to take it one day at a time. Things won't change overnight, but if today is just a little bit better than yesterday, then one day you turn around and think 'man, I'm back to normal and I can move on with my life.'"

"Lean on the people you trust and don't be afraid to ask for help. It's super important!"

Want to find out more?? Go to the Canadian Mental Health Association's site www.cmha.ca for more information on depression and other mood disorders.

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ask dr. T



Hey Dr. T.,
If I'm giving a guy oral sex, should he wear a condom to minimize the risk of transmitting STI's??
- S

Dear S,
You got it baby! If the male partner uses a condom during oral sex it will absolutely decrease the chance of all STIs but it has to be used at all times because some STIs, for example herpes, require just skin to skin contact.

Hey Dr. T.,
I'm kinda worried 'bout giving a girl cunnilingus. Where can I get dental dams? And what's a 'split' condom??
- The Splitz

Dear Splitz,
Dental dams can be purchased at the Shagalicious Shop at Student Health Services (www.mcgill.ca/studenthealth). They are a buck each, tax included. What's a split condom? Its exactly that: you take a condom and cut the tip off then split it down one side so that it forms a rectangular piece of latex that can be used as a dental dam.

Hey Dr. T.,
I recently found out my boyfriend has chlamydia and I think that means I will have it too. He said the last person he slept with gave it to him, which was almost a year ago. We have had unprotected sex within the last six months and I won't be able to be treated for another two weeks. What I'd like to know is if it is dangerous for me to have had this infection for this long? Is it deadly? Thanks alot!
- Help!

Dear Help!
A chlamydia infection is not deadly. It can, however, can lead to a "silent" pelvic inflammatory disease. A pelvic inflammatory disease is when an infection extends to your uterus and fallopian tubes. Once there, it can cause scarring of the tubes or the development of scar tissue between the opening of the tubes and your ovary or abdominal wall. Depending on how extensive this is, may lead to tubal pregnancy or even infertility. The word "silent" when used in this context means that the damage is being done without causing you any obvious pain or discomfort. The question is whether the infection has spread and has it caused any damage and if so how much damage has it caused. This is difficult to tell but clearly while it is there this can happen at any time.

Dear Dr. T.,
When my boyfriend and I engage in sexual intercourse he has an orgasm within 2 minutes! We want to know why his stamina is not there? I want more! Any ideas??
- Shelly

Dear Shelly,
This could be for a variety of reasons. The most common is that he gets anxious and that makes him ejaculate early. It could also be that he is very sensitive. I would suggest a condom since that decreases the sensation for your guy. Another option is to see a sex therapist - it usually takes time to see results, but it can be very useful.

Dear Dr. T.,
I have seen a continuing trend in my sexual experiences where I am unable to get an erection or I lose desire as soon as I get intimate with my partner. Should I consider Viagra as a possibility course of action to restore my sexual confidence?
- Floppy Drive

Floppy,
Viagra does sound like a good idea, but I would make sure that you have no medical problems first that would explain this erectile dysfunction. To obtain a Viagra prescription, make an appointment with your doctor.

Dear Dr. T.,
I have folliculitis. Is it okay for me to get my pubic hair waxed or will I have problems?
- Emma

Dear Emma,
The presence of folliculitis indicates that you have a high bacterial count on your skin so waxing will tend to spread the bacteria and cause more infected hair follicles.

Dear Dr. T.,
I have been masturbating for a while and I need to know because I am so worried: does sperm grow back? I wanna know that when I have sex later on I'll have enough sperm!
- Worried

Hey Worried,
You'll be happy to know that sperm is constantly being produced by the testicles so it is always there. Now if you masturbate regularly the volume may be less but that is of no real significance.

Dr. Pierre Tellier (Dr. T) is the Medical Director of Student Health Services
Ask Dr. T online at www.mcgill.ca/studenthealth/ask