

MIT OpenCourseWare
<http://ocw.mit.edu>

SP.236 / ESG.SP236 Exploring Pharmacology
Spring 2009

For information about citing these materials or our Terms of Use, visit: <http://ocw.mit.edu/terms>.

Practical Knowledge

You're at a party, just wandering from group to group, when you come upon a cluster of merrymakers that look more concerned than merry. They're looking at a guy lying on his side in a corner. Every once in a while, he'll twitch a bit, but otherwise, he looks like he's passed out. Someone prods him with a foot, eliciting a groan.

"Alright, I guess he'll be fine," the owner of the foot says, "and he's on his side, in case he throws up or something." Satisfied, the crowd drifts away. However, you don't feel so good about just leaving the guy there... you don't know how much he's had to drink, and you're concerned that if you walk away, he'll stop breathing or something.

- What are some of the known mechanisms of alcohol?
 - How are they thought to relate to the state of being drunk?
- What are the symptoms of alcohol poisoning?
 - How do the mechanisms of alcohol relate to the symptoms?

Suddenly, you realize that there's something pretty weird about the situation: this guy doesn't smell like he's drunk. You lean in a bit closer to sniff his breath (good, he's breathing) and find that you still can't smell that characteristic, alcoholic odor there. What's going on here? Did someone punch him out? (You see no obvious injuries) Could he have taken something else?

- What drugs might cause someone to pass out?
 - List a few, split them up, and look up their mechanisms.
- Assuming that he did take another substance:
 - Is he more at risk of complications?

You really can't decide whether or not to call for help—what if you're just overreacting? What if this guy turns out to be fine, and everyone else gets upset with you for calling? Not knowing what else to do, you grab this guy's shoulder, shake him a bit, and yell, "what did you take?" He doesn't answer. In fact, he gives no sign that he heard you at all. You decide that it's time to call the EMTs.

- What's going to happen to this guy when he gets to the hospital?
 - How are overdoses (of the different drugs that we listed) treated?