Hi Alice,

Recently (the last six months or so) I've been getting really tired after a couple of drinks (let's say three or four). By eleven at night, I'm ready to call it quits. My friends and boyfriend poke fun at me because I usually head home before they do. How can I last longer in a healthy way? I definitely try to drink water throughout the night, but is there anything else?

Thanks!

Asleep before midnight

Answer

Dear Asleep before midnight,

Feeling drowsy after three or four drinks close to midnight is completely normal? alcohol is a depressant that reduces alertness and increases sleepiness. Many factors help contribute to sleepiness when drinking, including use of other drugs/medications, fatigue, and illness. Fortunately, there are ways to maximize the fun of partying while also maintaining a good night?s sleep? and avoiding a hangover [2].

Consider the following strategies:

- Alternate alcohol and non-alcohol drinks throughout the night. In addition to water, try club soda, juice, or a soft drink with a lime wedge or maraschino cherry in a lowball glass.
- Head out earlier in the evening to prevent fatigue later in the night.
- Consider staying in rather than going out, especially when feeling tired.
- Eat before and during drinking. Consider snacks with complex carbohydrates (whole grains, fruits, veggies, and beans) to keep your energy up.
- Move around or hit the dance floor! Keeping your blood pumping will help you feel awake. Just make sure to hydrate with water when engaging in physical activity, especially if the environment is warm.
- Once you?re ready to leave, make a smooth but resolute exit. Say goodnight to your friends and boyfriend and be firm in your decision to leave. Better yet, have a friend leave with you? there?s power in numbers, and you?ll have a travel partner!
• Clock in plenty of hours of sleep throughout the week to prevent the accumulation of sleep deprivation.
• Take an afternoon or evening nap the day of the gathering to refresh your mind and body.
• If you drink caffeine, have a cup of coffee or black tea an hour or so before you go out. Small, frequent doses of caffeine can be very helpful (especially if you also drink water to counterbalance the diuretic effects of caffeine), but steer clear of caffeinated alcoholic drinks, which can mask the effects of intoxication until the caffeine wears off.

Most importantly, think about whether the pressure coming from your friends and boyfriend is an acceptable reason to stay out later than you’d like. If your friends and boyfriend are just teasing you in a playful way, they might respond well to a quirky response, such as “Alright kiddos, granny’s off to bed!?” or “I’m too tired to hit the bars? I’d rather hit the hay.” However, if the pressure is more serious, you might try making a simple, honest, and straightforward statement, like “I’m really exhausted, and I won’t be much fun if I don’t get to bed soon.” If that doesn’t work, you might reevaluate your social circle and seek out friends who are more supportive of your needs and sleep habits.

Because your difficulty in staying up late is a recent occurrence, you might also consider scheduling an appointment with your health care provider to determine whether you recent sleepiness is a result of an underlying medical condition. For more general information on alcohol, check out Columbia Health’s website about alcohol and other drugs [3]. You can also check out the Go Ask Alice! Alcohol, Nicotine, & Other Drugs [4] archive.

Alice!
Category:
Alcohol & Other Drugs [5]
Alcohol [6]
General Health [7]
Sleep [8]

Related questions
Hangover helper and tips for healthy drinking [9]
All night, done right: Getting the most out of an all-nighter [10]
Mixing alcohol with energy drinks – safe or risky? [11]
Decreasing amount of sleep needed [12]
Short sleep + long naps = Healthy? [13]

Resources
Medical Services (Morningside) [14]
Medical Services (CUMC) [15]
a!Sleep website [16]
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