Avoid hangover? [1]

Dear Alice,

What can be done to reduce the effects of a hangover? I heard that drinking water before going to bed will help.

? Aching Head

Answer

Dear Aching Head,

No one enjoys the infamous morning-after hangover — upset stomach, shakiness, headache, thirst, aches and pains, and that general terrible feeling that follows a night of heavy drinking. One of the best ways to prevent these symptoms is to do some pre-party planning.

The chances of experiencing a hangover significantly increase with five or more drinks, especially when consumed in a short period of time. Research supports the theory that the major cause of a hangover is simply drinking too much. Drinking a large quantity of alcohol quickly, as is usually the case in drinking games, tends to increase the incidence of hangovers — not to mention other negative effects, such as alcohol poisoning. So, pacing yourself and limiting yourself to one drink an hour are ways to keep headaches and upset stomachs at bay. Try:

- Drinking slowly
- Sipping rather than gulping
- Diluting drinks
- Avoiding shots
- Alternating alcoholic with non-alcoholic beverages
- Eating a substantial meal before drinking

Remember, one drink is equivalent to a twelve ounce can of beer, five ounces of wine, or a standard mixed drink made with one to one and a half ounces of liquor.

Most likely, the alcohol and the lactic acid that builds up as the alcohol is metabolized are responsible for the nausea, headache, and irritability. These symptoms, as well as thirst, are also a result of alcohol's diuretic effect, increasing your need to pee. When drinking alcoholic beverages, you will wind up letting go of more liquid than you take in. Thus, it's good to re-hydrate with water and other non-alcoholic, non-carbonated, non-caffeinated drinks both while

If you wind up feeling sick, despite precautionary measures, there are a few things you can do. Some people take ibuprofen before going to bed or upon waking (careful, this could make upset stomach worse). Others drink two to three glasses of water before hitting the sack, as you mention. If you can stay awake until you feel more sober, your morning-after hangover may be lessened somewhat. These measures may help to relieve headache and other aches and pains, but they do not decrease the amount of alcohol in your body, so you may still have other hangover symptoms. Avoid taking acetaminophen (Tylenol) if you've been drinking, combining acetaminophen and alcohol can have harmful effects on the liver.

If you don't feel queasy, some find that eating a meal or a mild snack makes them feel better. The food doesn't actually absorb the alcohol, like many believe. Instead, it may help you to stay energized and help the remaining alcohol metabolize at a reasonable rate. Contrary to popular myths about coffee, vitamin B, and physical activity, time is the only sure way to cure a hangover. With coffee, what have you got? A wide awake drunk. Some find that vitamin B makes them feel better, but currently there is no research to back this up. Physical activity (sweating it out) may make you feel better because you are getting your mind off of how miserable you feel, but it doesn't speed up the metabolism of the alcohol. And, that old myth of taking a cold shower to sober up is not good advice; it will further the decrease in body temperature caused by alcohol. A wet bathroom is also an accident waiting to happen: slippery, cold, hard, and drunk are not good combinations.

On the other end of the spectrum are people who may down a lot of alcohol without getting a hangover. This could be a sign of an alcohol problem. If this sounds like you or someone you know, you might consider making an appointment to meet with a substance abuse specialist. You can also get in touch with your school's health and/or counseling services.

Enough said. Cheers to healthy drinking!

Alice!
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