Hangover helper and tips for healthy drinking [1]

Dear Alice,

Do you have any tips for avoiding hangovers?

Hungover

Answer

Dear Hungover,

Most people who consume too much alcohol in a given drinking occasion will experience a hangover at some point. Hangovers are a set of symptoms that are thought to be brought on by withdrawal from a temporary drug addiction, or they may result from alcohol's chemical contents.

One of the best ways to minimize the symptoms of a hangover – headaches, nausea, diarrhea, fatigue, dehydration, and body aches – is to practice some prevention before and during your drinking episodes. Here are some popular tips on how to do just that:

**Drink for the right reasons.** Social occasions and celebrations are pretty good reasons for having a drink. Reducing stress, releasing anger, or trying to prove something to someone are unhealthy motivations for alcohol consumption and may actually quicken the intoxication process and increase nasty side effects.

**Hold that line.** You're probably familiar with your tolerance of alcoholic beverages (the point when the alcohol you've consumed begins to cause noticeable physical and psychological changes). Crossing your line can easily send you into hangover land the next morning. Challenge yourself to hold that line – set and state a drink max before you go out. Your body and friends will thank you tomorrow.

**Pace yourself.** Hangover helpers and healthy drinkers recommend one drink per hour as a guide. This rate gives your body a chance to process the alcohol without sending it special delivery to your head. Try to limit yourself to three or four drinks in a 24-hour period and not more than once or twice a week.

**Mix, not!** Avoid alternating the types of alcohol you consume. If you begin with beer, stick with beer. Starting with Scotch? Stay with Scotch, and so on. For many,
downing different kinds of drinks leads to hellatious headaches and sick stomachs. It’s challenging enough for your body to react to one variety of alcohol, so why give it a harder time with two, three, or four?

Consider the congeners. Congeners are natural by-products of alcohol fermentation. The higher the congener content, the greater the hangover. Gin and vodka have the fewest congeners, while bourbon and red wine claim the most.

Chow down. Eat a substantial meal before you go out to a party or bar. Bread products and foods high in protein, like milk and cheese, slow the absorption of alcohol into the bloodstream by coating your stomach and small intestine. Nibbling on finger foods throughout the night may also slow the intoxication process.

Alternate. Start your partying with some food, then have a beer, then down some water or juice before having another beer (remember to pace yourself along the way). Don’t switch off with carbonated drinks? they may speed up intoxication and heighten hangovers.

Sip or sink. Drink each alcoholic beverage slowly. Remember, your liver can only handle about one serving of alcohol an hour (i.e., 12 oz. beer, four to five oz. of wine, or one to 1.5 oz. of hard liquor). Rapid consumption of alcohol via shots, funnels, and drinking games are sure to win you a big hangover.

Have another drink... of water. Alcohol is a diuretic. Drink plenty of water during and after alcohol use to ward off dehydration, headaches, and achiness.

For more information on lower-risk drinking, check out the Go Ask Alice! Alcohol & Other Drugs [2] archive. Following these tips can help you enjoy your drinks...and the next morning.

Cheers,

Alice!

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