Dear Alice,

I found a product for Hangovers that people claim really works. From the ingredient list, attached, can you offer your opinion? It contains Vitamin B-1 (250 mg), Aspirin (450 mg), Tylenol (288 mg), Calcium Carbonate (500 mg), and Caffeine (64 mg).

Answer

Dear Reader,

Many people seem to have a secret hangover remedy they swear by and many companies are banking on the fact that those "morning after" hangover symptoms can be downright awful. A word to the wise, however: the only real "cure" for a hangover is time. In the meantime, nourishing the body can help to overcome a hangover by treating the symptoms. In terms of that flashy new hangover cure you mentioned, it may be helpful to break it down by each ingredient to find out just how valid these claims may be or if old-fashioned remedies might be more effective after too many ?Old Fashioned? drinks the night before!

Vitamin B-1, also known as thiamine, is found in many grains and proteins naturally. It's used to treat digestive problems, boost the immune system, enhance learning and positive moods, stay alert, combat stress, and prevent memory loss for Alzheimer's disease. However, there is insufficient evidence that B-1 helps with hangovers.

Aspirin is a pain reliever often used to reduce fever, inflammation, and the discomfort associated with headaches, injuries, and arthritis. Its use in a cure for hangovers may at first seem sensible, perhaps even necessary, to deal with the customary head and body aches. However, aspirin causes stomach irritation for many people. Considering that alcohol, and heavy drinking in particular, can also cause stomach upset, mixing the two substances may not be a good idea. If you have a history of stomach irritation or ulcers, check with your health care provider before using aspirin for any condition.

Tylenol is a brand name for acetaminophen. Its uses are very similar to those for aspirin, although acetaminophen may not help with swelling or stiffness in one's joints. Again, like aspirin, taking acetaminophen to treat the discomfort of a hangover may be effective. For many people, it won't cause harm if using sparingly after a hangover. However, if you have a history of liver or kidney disease, seeking medical advice prior to use would be wise. Over the long-term, combining alcohol and acetaminophen has been found to cause liver damage.
Calcium carbonate is an antacid. Antacids help to treat the symptoms of heartburn and acid indigestion caused by the presence of too much acid in the stomach and esophagus (the tube connecting your mouth to your stomach). They don’t necessarily help with nausea. It’s rare to have problems with antacids when they’re used as recommended. However, if you take certain medications (like an iron supplement, salicylates, quinolones, or vitamin B-1), check in with a medical professional before taking, as they may interact with antacids. It might also be helpful to know that alcohol inhibits antacids from doing its job as well as it normally would.

Finally, caffeine might help relieve headaches and make you feel more energized. It’s caffeine’s vasoconstrictor action that helps to diminish or prevent head pain caused by dilated blood vessels by reducing blood flow through your veins. Research on rats has shown that caffeine administered after alcohol consumption can help with feeling less intoxicated and can reduce swelling in blood vessels. But, at the same time, caffeine may irritate your stomach, worsening any existing queasiness. In addition, caffeine, like alcohol, is a diuretic, causing the consumer to pee more frequently. This may exacerbate the dehydration effects that can make hangovers difficult.

So, this hangover cure may or may not help the recovery process after a night of heavy drinking. If you frequently experience hangovers, you may want to consider switching up your drinking habits, such as having a glass of water in between alcoholic beverages, to reduce your chances of needing such a remedy. In the meantime, feel free to check out Hangover helper and tips for healthy drinking in the Go Ask Alice! Alcohol & Other Drugs archives for even more information on how to help or prevent a hangover.

Hope this helps,

Alice!

Category:
Alcohol & Other Drugs
Alcohol
Caffeine, Energy Boosters, & Other Performance Enhancing Drugs

Related questions

Avoid hangover?  
Mixing alcohol and acetaminophen? How can I reduce my risk for side effects?  
Mixing alcohol with energy drinks? Safe or risky?  
How do I drink in moderation?  
No hangovers = problem?  
Suddenly, drinking alcohol makes me sick!

Resources

Medical Services (Morningside)  
Columbia Health BASICS program (Morningside)  
Medical Services (CUMC)  
Student Health Service BASICS program (CUMC)  

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