Hangover-helping product? [1]

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,

It seems like everyone has a secret hangover remedy they swear by. These days, many companies are banking on the fact that those "morning after" symptoms can be downright miserable, and stubborn. A word to the wise, however: the only real cure for a hangover is time. No matter what you do to lessen the symptoms? aches, nausea, sluggishness? you'll still just have to wait for your body to finish processing and getting rid of the excess alcohol you've consumed. The most effective way to deal with hangovers is to manage your drinking as you go along, so that your body has a chance to balance things out as you drink? therefore, avoiding the yuck-factor altogether. For more information about hangovers and healthy drinking habits, read the Related Q&As listed below.

Now, about this supposed wonder-product you describe: it sounds like the clever marketers behind this one have simply combined the most common "home remedies" into one slick package. The only difference is that as an eager consumer, you might wind up paying a lot more for their hangover helper than if you bought each ingredient separately, and with less flashy packaging. Having an understanding of each ingredient and its effects can help you decide which, if any, you'd like to take after over-imbibing.

First, vitamin B-1: usually referred to as Thiamin, this B vitamin is commonly found in oranges, potatoes, peanuts and raisins, wheat germ, and whole grains. It helps maintain normal functioning of the nervous system, muscles, and heart. Many also believe that it helps reduce feelings of tiredness and depression, while increasing appetite and alertness. Long-term alcohol abuse often results in thiamin deficiency. In theory, a night of heavy alcohol intake could have an impact on your vitamin levels, particularly if you have vomited or lack an appetite and therefore eat little in the next few days. Taking this vitamin, or a multi-vitamin for that matter, may help your body return to normal functioning, but don't expect any miracles.

Aspirin is a pain reliever often used to reduce fever, inflammation, and the discomfort associated with headaches, injuries, and arthritis. Its use in a supposed magic potion for
hangovers may at first seem sensible, perhaps even necessary, to deal with the customary head and body aches. However, aspirin causes stomach irritation in a lot of people. As alcohol, and particularly heavy drinking, also causes stomach upset, mixing of 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 will not help with swelling or stiffness in one's joints. Again, like aspirin, taking acetaminophen to treat the discomfort of a hangover seems sensible. For many people, it is fine once in a while. However, if you have a history of liver or kidney disease, consult with your health care provider first. 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/or esophagus (the tube connecting your mouth to your stomach). They do not necessarily help with nausea. It is rare to have problems with antacids when they are used as recommended. However, if you take certain prescription medications, talk with a health care provider first as they may interact with antacids. Their use may also change (decrease or increase) the effectiveness of any other medications you take; and, in fact, alcohol inhibits the antacid from doing its job as well as it normally would. Also, do not take an aluminum or magnesium-based antacid if you have kidney disease. There are also some studies that show that certain antacids, namely ranitidine and cimetidine, may increase blood alcohol levels when used with alcohol. But the evidence is conflicting, and there is no reason to believe that antacids besides these two (calcium carbonate, for example) would have similar effects.

Finally, caffeine: this stimulant is the ingredient in coffee that helps millions wake up in the morning. Taking caffeine in tablet form, or simply drinking a cup of coffee, the morning after an episode of heavy drinking 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. But, at the same time, caffeine may irritate your stomach, worsening any existing queasiness. In addition, caffeine, like alcohol, is a diuretic?it will make you pee a lot. Often, hangover symptoms are caused in part by dehydration, so it's important to drink lots of water and other non-carbonated beverages during and after alcohol intake. However, caffeine may inhibit re-hydration.

Now, having said all of that, you might want to remember that trying to avoid hangovers may be best for both your body and your wallet. Each person will need to decide how s/he want to use alcohol (if at all) and what will be done to prevent or deal with hangovers. Most commercial hangover remedies are not really all that necessary, but ultimately what you do is up to you!

Hope this helps,

Alice!

Category: 
Alcohol [2]

Related questions

Hangover helper and tips for healthy drinking [3]
How should I help my drunk friend? [4]
Grapefruit juice and drug interactions? [5]
Mixing alcohol with energy drinks? safe or risky? [6]
Trouble controlling my drinking? [7]
Over-the-counter (OTC) hangover cures? [8]

Published date:
Sep 03, 1999
Last reviewed on:
Aug 16, 2007

Go Ask Alice! is not an emergency or instant response service.
If you are in an urgent situation, please visit our Emergency page to view a list of 24 hour support services and hotlines.

Source URL: http://www.goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/hangover-helping-product#comment-0

Links