

NEWS

The University of Texas Health Science Center at Dallas
5323 Harry Hines Boulevard Dallas, Texas 75235 (214)688-3404

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CONTACT: Jamie Friar
Office: 214/688-3404
Home: 214/327-8544

***Everything you always wanted to know about hangovers.

A dark brown taste, a burning thirst,
A head that's ready to split and burst...
No time for mirth, no time for laughter-
The cold gray dawn of the morning after.

George Ade: Remorse (1903)

DALLAS---Alcohol is the oldest mind-altering drug and still the most abused. As we all know, an evening of bacchanalian debauchery has its toll, the cold gray dawn of the morning after.

Despite the fact that alcohol and its effects on the human body have been extensively studied, relatively little research has been conducted on the hangover. Over the years a number of folk remedies and myths have evolved on curing hangovers. Oxygen, tomato juice, raw eggs and, of course, the "hair of the dog that bit you" have all been touted as being hangover cures. Norwegians, whose idiomatic hangover expression translates to "workmen in the head," swear by a glass of heavy cream. The Swiss recommend brandy with peppermint. Americans might try some black coffee, oysters or the ubiquitous Bloody Mary. Unfortunately the curative powers of the various hangover remedies lie mostly where the pain is...in the head.

The pain of the morning after has roots in a number of alcohol's physiological actions and on our emotional reaction to drinking. Alcohol is quickly absorbed into the bloodstream and distributed throughout the body. Dr. Jon Blachley, assistant professor of Internal Medicine at The University of Texas Health Science Center at Dallas, says that all cells are affected. Cell membranes are disrupted and the alcohol tends to draw fluid from the cells. In addition alcohol acts as a diuretic causing an increase in urination. One possible consequence of a bout with the bottle is dehydration, a component of the hangover.

Alcohol is metabolized in the liver at a rather slow rate. Though a cocktail is high in calories, the metabolic process may cause the blood sugar level to drop, another ingredient in the hangover stew.

(over)

As for what the Swedes call "pain in the roots of the hair," substances known as congeners seem to be implicated. Congeners are impurities in the alcohol that give the booze its characteristic color and flavor. Brandy, red wines, whiskey and bourbon are all high in congeners and have the worst hangover potential. In one study, volunteers were given the same amount of alcohol in different forms. The "colored" drinks caused the worst hangovers, while vodka and pure grain alcohol drinkers suffered least. In addition to the congeners, the sudden change in alcohol level in the brain as the alcohol is metabolized may be a factor in the morning-after head pounding.

The queasy stomach and nausea one suffers the next morning is a result of alcohol irritating the sensitive lining of the stomach and intestinal tract.

Another key factor in how bad a hangover will be may be how you feel about drinking. Those who feel guilty about drinking or drink under stressful circumstances tend to have worse hangovers.

There is something to be said for the "hair of the dog" philosophy. More alcohol will temporarily mediate some hangover symptoms, but your hangover will only be that much worse when the morning-after drink wears off.

Tom Garrison, owner of Dallas' Stoneleigh P bar, recalls a preventive measure from his college days in Norman, Okla. "It was called the Denco Darlin', named after a local truck stop. A metal plate heaped high with spaghetti, chili and topped off with two eggs over easy." Garrison says a crucial ingredient was grease that pooled at the bottom of the plate. According to Garrison, generations of OU fraternity brothers swear by the effectiveness of the Denco Darlin'.

Grease or oil to coat the stomach is often mentioned as a way to prevent a hangover. Andy Clendenen, the proprietor of Andrew's and Chelsea Corner, also in Dallas, says he has heard of peanut butter, olive oil and saffron oil touted as ways to prevent hangovers. Twin brother Randy said some of the cures he has heard discussed over the bar include: a beer with tomato juice and fresh ground pepper, hot Coca-Cola, the Mexican tripe soup menudo or soda water with bitters.

Myths and folk remedies aside, there are some ways to cope with and perhaps prevent the morning-after syndrome. The most obvious is, of course, not to drink, or at least not to excess. If you are going to be drinking, eat something first. The food will protect your stomach against the irritation of alcohol and cause the alcohol to be absorbed more slowly into the bloodstream.

If your better judgment is overcome by the festivities of the holiday season, you might try drinking as much fluid as possible before you go to bed. Some physicians suggest fruit juice or soft drink to counteract alcohol's potential of lowering the blood sugar level. Blachley says drinking non-alcoholic beverages will help replace fluids lost by the body. Blachley thinks an over-the-counter pain reliever may be helpful for a hangover headache and antacid for the stomach discomfort. His personal hangover remedy, "I try to have as much extra fluid on board as possible, such as fruit juice, a couple of Tylenol, go to bed and hope for the best."

The only sure-fire hangover cure is time. Eventually all the alcohol will be metabolized. In the meantime, try to get some rest and make a resolution not to drink so much next holiday season.

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