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How to Cure a Hangover

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The morning after a hard night of partying like a rock star isn’t usually pleasant. We can fix it. by Shandra Wendorff

The sun shines through your window, glaring in your face. You toss, turn, and duck under the covers to avoid it, but the bright light combined with your throbbing head is too much to bear. Your friend’s idea to go to Welch Avenue for another “Thirsty Thursday” sounded okay at the time, but having all those $1 drinks probably wasn’t.

So after swearing off drinking (again), you accept that you have to get up for the day. The question is: How do you get rid of this hangover?

The most common symptoms of a hangover are headaches, nausea, shaking, and fatigue. The Life Extension Foundation web site says after alcohol consumption, two toxic compounds form in the body: acetaldehyde and malondialdehyde. They damage cells throughout the body, creating an effect similar to radiation poisoning. In short, that’s why we feel like crap after one too many drinks.

Several factors play a role in how different people are affected by alcohol. Denise Denton, temporary instructor of health and human performance, says gender can determine just how hard alcohol hits you.

“Men have leaner muscle tissue than women do, so they absorb their alcohol faster,” Denton says. “A good rule is that the bigger body gets rid of alcohol faster.” No wonder they call them lightweights.

Denton adds that women’s hormones make their impairment more severe at certain times during their menstrual cycles. Women are most sensitive to alcohol during the days before a menstrual cycle, she says.

Women on birth control also become drunk faster than women not using it, Denton says. She adds that if you’re tired or sick you should avoid drinking altogether. “If you’re sick and on medication, you’re sending mixed messages to your brain. That’s dangerous,” she says.

Hangovers are not solely dose-related and have a lot to do with the type of alcohol consumed, according to the Annals of Internal Medicine web site. Congeners, the by-products of alcohol preparations found primarily in brandy, wine, tequila, whiskey, and other dark liquors, increase the frequency and severity of hangovers. On the other hand, clear liquids such as rum, vodka, and gin tend to cause hangovers less frequently.

Advice on preventing and curing hangovers varies. A bartender at People’s Bar and Grill suggests watching the amount of sweets you put in your drink. “The more sugary stuff you put in your body, the worse you’ll feel,” he says. “For example, a whiskey and Coke is going to do a lot more damage than a whiskey and water.”

Denton advises eating protein before you begin drinking. “Protein coats your stomach [while] things like bread just make you feel full,” she says.

Denton also advises drinking plenty of water before partying, since alcohol acts as a major dehydrator to the body. “People make the mistake of gulping water the next morning when they have cottonmouth. That just throws you back into a drunken state, because it starts the alcohol that you have left in your body flowing again.”

However, Abby Hansen, bartender at the Maintenance Shop, says she still thinks water is one of the best cures. “Drink a lot of water before you go to bed and pop two Advil,” advises Hansen, a junior in liberal studies. “Water is really the best thing for you.”

Instead of water, Denton advises drinking other liquids such as Gatorade, and taking two aspirin when you wake up.

John Chiodo, who works at the Keg Shop on Welch Avenue, developed his own theories about curing hangovers. The junior in political science claims that vitamin B is a good weapon to fight off the post-drinking blues. “I’ve heard if you take vitamin B before you go to bed with water, it helps,” he says.

The Life Extension Foundation web site endorses vitamin B as a preventative measure, stating that it neutralizes alcohol by-products and protects cells from the effects of alcohol.

So when Friday morning rolls around and that 8 o’clock class is staring you in the face after a “Thirsty Thursday” adventure, you’ve got to face the music.

“Alcohol only leaves the body through perspiration, breathing, expiration, sweating, urinating, and vomiting,” Denton says. “The best things you can do for yourself is to take aspirin and stay out of the light and away from loud noise the morning after. And, of course, sleeping it off will be less painful.”

Shandra Wendorff is a sophomore in pre-journalism and a staff writer for Ethos. She doesn’t get hangovers because she’s a good girl.