

How to cure a hangover: the good, the bad and the ugly

It's that time of year again when many of us wake up after a busy social event muttering those fateful words, "I am never drinking again". Even healthy nutritionists like myself have had to deal with some real corkers! As the festive season looms closer and your diary fills up, it's a good time to think about some of the good and more infamous hangover cures that may help to relieve your symptoms the next day.

What is a hangover?

When you drink alcohol, it gets broken down in the liver to a compound called acetaldehyde, which is a toxic compound that contributes to the feelings associated with a hangover. Obviously, the more you drink the greater the buildup of toxin and hence worse hangover. The main symptoms of a hangover include headaches from the dilation of blood vessels, dehydration from the increased need to urinate, nausea and stomach aches from the increased acidity. Sleep also plays a major part in the severity of your hangover and the less you get the worse you will feel across the day.

Try and prep your liver

If you know December is going to be a whirlwind of parties, then try and be good to your liver when you're not out on the town. Try classic herbal remedies such as [milk thistle](#) (try Healthspan, 30 tablets for 12.95) or [artichoke extract](#) (try Healthspan, 120 tablets for £8.95) that have been traditionally used to support your liver health.

Eating healthily at all other times is obviously a good idea too and foods such as bitter green vegetables and globe artichokes have been shown to improve bile flow (helping to remove toxins more efficiently) and help with the detoxification process (1). Beetroot has also been traditionally associated with liver health by way of a plant compound called betaine (2). Regardless of their potential to promote liver health, brightly colored fruits and vegetables make a valued addition to the diet and help by reducing the damage cause by excess free radicals as well as adding fibre and micronutrients to the diet.

Hangover cures

There are very few hangover cures that will generally work and in reality, the only way to prevent one is to stay sober, which is not much fun during the party season. Try and make sure you eat before you go out and try and keep hydrated by alternating water with alcoholic drinks. If all else fails, try the tips below, which are some of the best, the worst and downright ugly of hangover cures.

The good

1. Rehydrate

Dehydration can leave you feeling tired, irritable, dizzy and generally not well especially when partnered with a drop in electrolytes that may occur after a heavy session. Drink plenty of fluids the next day but try and avoid very sugary drinks as this can affect blood sugar levels leaving you feeling even more sluggish. You could also try adding in an electrolyte sachet to help rebalance your system and replace nutrients commonly depleted by alcohol including magnesium, potassium, calcium and B vitamins.

2. Go Long!

Try opting for drinks made with soda water or low calorie mixers as these will help to dilute the alcohol and give you a longer lasting drink. Go for single shots of spirits or small glasses of white or rose wine to top up.

3. Don't drink on an empty stomach

This is a classic mistake, especially if you're going straight out after work. Drinking on an empty stomach can make you much more sensitive to the effects of alcohol and is often a recipe for disaster. Alcohol also acts as an appetite stimulant so you're more likely to end up tucking heavily into the buffet or queuing up in MC Donalds on your way home. Try eating something nourishing before you go out that has a good source of protein and fat to help keep you feeling full and soaking up some of the booze.

4. **Eggs for breakfast**

Try something light in the morning that will help to get your blood sugar levels back up and bring a little closer to feeling yourself again. Something like eggs on toast is a great option as these nutritional powerhouses contain a good source of the amino acid, cysteine that helps to breakdown acetaldehyde in the liver.

5. **Avoid brown drinks**

Congeners are more concentrated in darker coloured alcohol drinks. These compounds are a toxic byproduct of the fermentation process and are often added for taste and appearance. Brown spirits and red wine contain a higher amount of congeners than lighter coloured drinks and can make hangovers more intense the next day

The bad

6. **Coffee**

If you can tolerate it then sure have a coffee. However, slugging back high caffeine drinks can leave you a bit jittery especially if you do so on an empty stomach. This can be a disaster if your stomach is feeling particularly sensitive. Try ginger tea for nausea or peppermint, caraway and fennel to relieve any bloating.

7. **Energy drinks**

However bad you feel try and steer clear of energy drinks. These are often loaded with sugar that will further upset blood sugar levels and the stimulants such as caffeine and taurine are likely to increase spasms in the bowel, which is not great for a delicate gut. Caffeine can also increase anxiety and suppress appetite, which is last thing you need when food is required to get you blood sugar levels back up.

8. **The greasy fry-up**

Some people swear by a good old greasy fry-up after a big session but this may not be your best option. Heavy, fatty foods take a while to digest and can be hard going on sensitive stomachs, whilst also increasing the chances of indigestion and heart burn. These stodgy types of foods will also leave you feeling sluggish across the day, only adding to your lack of vitality.

The ugly

9. **The Prarie Oyster**

This is not for the faint hearted and its recipe goes back to the early 1920's (think Sally Bowls in the movie, Caberet). Combine tomato juice, raw egg, tabasco, Worcestershire sauce, salt and pepper then enjoy?

10. **Pickled plums (Umeboshi)**

These taste both salty and sour. Umeboshi are traditionally viewed as a hangover remedy in Japan given their supposed ability to help relieve nausea, dizziness and fatigue. These are definitely an acquired taste and not sure they're really what you would want to be eating with a sensitive stomach and nausea but feel free to try!

Hangover tonic

Try this Hangover Tonic the next morning to get your blood sugar levels back up and replace the vitamin and minerals depleted by alcohol.

Green vegetables like kale help increase bile flow through the liver to remove toxins effectively. Cucumbers and lettuce are great foods to help hydrate the body after a boozy night and the fruit sugars in pears can help to raise low blood sugar to help you feel yourself again.

Serves 2

1/2 cucumber

3 kale leaves (take soft leaves off the stem)

1 small handful coriander

1 lime (juice only)

1 head Romaine lettuce

2 pears

Method

1. Chop ingredients and blend high for 30 seconds
2. Lay muslin over a bowl, pour in juice then grab the four corners of cloth and squeeze out the juice

There's no reason to be a fun sponge during the seasonal festivities and often a hangover is just the price you pay. It's important to make sure that you drink sensibly and within the recommended number of units. For more information go to www.drinkaware.co.uk

References

1. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22010973>
2. <http://ajcn.nutrition.org/content/80/3/539.full#sec-4>

