What is a Hangover?

A hangover is a term used to describe the effects felt the morning after a night of excessive drinking. If you are guilty of consuming just a little too much the night before, then you will most likely wake up with a hangover.

Physical symptoms such as a pounding headache, queasy stomach, dry throat, redness of the eyes, thirst and fatigue are commonly associated with a hangover. In addition, you may also experience a rapid heartbeat, tremors, muscle aches, and sweating. Mental symptoms such as dizziness, depression, irritability and anxiety are also common.

It makes sense that a mood-altering substance, such as alcohol, will affect mood. Although it may feel like it alters your mood in a positive way at the time of consumption, the remnants of alcohol in your bloodstream and brain the next day affect your natural ‘feel good’ chemicals and cause mood disturbances.

What Causes a Hangover?

If you drink too much the night before, there are a number of reasons you may wake up with a hangover.

Causes of a Hangover

- Drinking more alcohol than your body can metabolize efficiently causes the toxins in the alcohol to build up in your body. A chemical known as acetaldehyde is an alcohol by-product, and is responsible for the severe symptoms of a hangover.
- The ethanol found in alcohol has a dehydrating effect, which is responsible for your raging headache, dry mouth and tiredness.
- Dark spirits such as red wine, brandy and whiskey contain more congeners (by-products of the process of alcohol fermentation), which increase the symptoms of a hangover. Cheaper spirits are also known to cause a worse hangover because fewer impurities have been removed.
- Body weight can be a key factor: A smaller body weight usually means a greater hangover.
- Mixing your drinks is a sure way to become inebriated and lead to a hangover. When you mix your drinks, for instance tequila and whiskey, you are actually mixing the different poisons of the alcohol together. More pressure is then placed on the liver to get rid of the toxins and cleanse the system by flushing them out – causing more dehydration.
Help for Hangovers

Without a doubt, the best **hangover prevention** is to abstain from alcohol or to limit your intake to amounts that your body can easily metabolize without causing too much harm. While this sounds great in theory, it is not always so easy in practice.

Conventional Medicine

Conventionally, there are several **treatments commonly recommended for hangover prevention**. Some medication may reduce the severity of the symptoms of a hangover. Over-the-counter (OTC) drugs such as aspirin and non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), such as ibuprofen or naproxen, are also useful for hangover prevention. However, remember that anti-inflammatory drugs are actually gastric irritants, so use them with caution as they may intensify alcohol-induced gastritis and further irritate any gastric problems.

After a night out drinking, the **most important thing is to drink water** the next day. Dehydration is one of the main **causes of a hangover**, and a headache is usually the first sign that the brain is dehydrated. It is essential to replace the delicate balance in the body by consuming an adequate amount of water, as well as eating a healthy, balanced meal (even though you may not feel like it).

Natural Remedies for Hangovers

To **treat a hangover the natural way by cleansing and eliminating the body of toxins** (brought about by excess alcohol), herbal and homeopathic remedies can be gentle yet very effective. Natural **hangover cures** can help to kick-start your body and restore balance.

Herbs such as Taraxacum officinalis (Dandelion), Foeniculum vulgare (Fennel) and Pelargonium reniforme can serve to flush out the system, rejuvenate liver functioning, and eliminate bloating. It is important to always remember to **source herbal remedies from a reputable company** to ensure non-contaminated ingredients, maximum efficacy, and product integrity.

Helpful Hints for Healing Hangovers

Because abstinence is easier said than done, we have put together some useful tips that can be used as **hangover cures** to help you get through ‘the morning after’:

- If you do have any alcohol, **drink small amounts**. Remember that small amounts of better-quality alcohol will cause fewer hangover symptoms.
- Drinking on an empty stomach is one of the better known **causes of a hangover**. Eat a large meal before drinking to line the stomach and slow down the rate of alcohol absorption into the bloodstream.
- **Eat bland foods** such toast or crackers to relieve nausea.
- Fructose-containing foods such as fruit and fruit juices may also decrease hangover intensity.
- **Drinking water** during and after alcohol consumption can minimize alcohol-induced dehydration, which is one of the main **causes of a**
**hangover.**

- Know your limits and **pace yourself by drinking slowly** (the body metabolizes alcohol and needs time to do so).
- **Avoid smoking while drinking**, since smoking constricts the lungs and decreases oxygen flow to the blood stream.
- Vitamin B helps to replace the nutrients lost while drinking.

### The Natural Approach

While Western medicine has become the norm in many cultures, it is not the only treatment option. Conventional western medicine, often called allopathic medicine, is the system of medicine taught at most medical schools. Most pharmaceutical and synthetic medicines are manufactured and marketed according to the principles of allopathic medicine. Allopathic medicine is also sometimes called orthodox medicine.

Because most of us in the Western world have grown up in a society in which allopathic medicine is the prevailing norm, we forget that only a few decades ago, homeopathic, herbal and other natural medicines were commonly available – and freely used even by conventional doctors. While there are often heated debates about which system of medicine is ‘better’ than the other, many responsible doctors (whether they are allopathic or not) recognize that both have a role to play in the treatment program.

Natural medicine has often been frowned upon by conventional doctors, especially by those who did not have sufficient knowledge of these medicines. However, it is encouraging to note that some medical schools are now beginning to re-introduce it into their course work, thereby providing doctors with a wider range of treatment options from which to choose. In many countries, especially in Europe, India and China, natural and homeopathic medicines are commonly prescribed by conventional doctors, and represent a significant part of the total annual drug sales.

Naturopathy is a branch of medicine (just as allopathy is a branch of medicine) which operates according to the underlying philosophy that the **body has an innate capacity to heal itself**. While natural medicines are often called ‘alternative’ or ‘complimentary’ medicines, they are, in fact, a unique and independent form of medicine in their own right, well able to treat a variety of conditions. Perhaps the term ‘holistic’ medicine is more apt, given the **broad range of treatment options and approaches** that are to be found within the practice of natural medicine. Holistic medicine encompasses many different disciplines, including herbalism, homeopathy, iridology, osteopathy, chiropractic, therapeutic massage techniques, aromatherapy, acupuncture and many, many more.

Most naturopaths will use a variety of treatment modalities in order to treat their patients in a holistic way to **support health, relieve symptoms, and prevent future disease**. In fact, even the World Health Organization defines health as being "...more than simply the absence of illness. It is the active state of physical, emotional, mental, and social well-being." This is a wonderfully clear description of holistic or natural medicine, which strives to support health (thereby relieving or preventing symptoms), rather than simply eliminating disease.

Although allopathic medicine certainly has a role to play and has made a

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tremendous contribution to medical science during the past century, there is a growing perception that it is not the only answer. In many cases, holistic medicine can accomplish just as much, if not more – without the risk of side effects, addiction, and sacrifice to health so commonly associated with pharmaceutical drugs.

Contrary to common perception-- and provided that they are manufactured in the correct way-- natural medicines can work quickly and safely to promote healing. In many cases, they can succeed where pharmaceutical drugs have failed. Despite frequent reports that they are ‘unproven’ and ‘untested’, the opposite is true. Natural medicines have a long history of usage and there is a wealth of empirical evidence to support their effectiveness and safety. In addition, active clinical research is carried out by many academic hospitals and universities to support the extensive traditional and empirical evidence behind natural medicines.

It is also important to know that like any medicine, herbal and homeopathic medicines must be manufactured in the correct way, following acceptable procedures and manufacturing methods to ensure maximum effectiveness and safety. Due to the recent rise in popularity of natural remedies, many companies have sprung up to take advantage of the market. Unfortunately, not all of them are equipped to manufacture to the correct standards, often resulting in a flood of inferior (and sometimes even unsafe) remedies onto the market – and giving natural remedies a bad name.

Even some pharmaceutical companies have rushed to claim their market share by producing so-called ‘standardized’ extracts of herbs and offering these as superior to the tried and tested methods of naturopathic manufacturing. Nothing could be further from the truth. While ‘standardized’ extracts may offer the benefit of easy consistency of dosage (and cheaper production lines), they have grave disadvantages, including an increase in side effects--as the medicines produced in this manner lose the natural protective properties of the herbs. In some cases, these side effects have proved fatal – as was seen in the liver toxicity associated with standardized extracts of kava kava, a herb previously safely used for generations without any known side effects.

Most naturopaths recommend what is called the Full Spectrum Method of extraction, which retains the benefits of ALL the active ingredients within the herb as opposed to isolating only one – thereby providing a more complete treatment as well as superior protection against side effects.

Whatever your choice, always choose wisely. Research what is best for you. If you have a chronic or life-threatening condition, don’t make changes without first discussing them with your doctor in order that your condition may be monitored. Well informed and supportive practitioners will support patients who want to take responsibility for their own health.

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