

Antacids sooth hangovers

When your evening of spirited merrymaking is pursued by a morning of hangover headaching, what do you do? After four years of Friday nights, most students — wisely — trust in time, aspirin and seltzer tablets. Generally speaking, other hangover "helpers" (and they range from eating raw eggs to sipping sauerkraut juice and tripe soup) simply aren't effective against a classic case of over-indulgence.

In medical terms, a hangover is a temporary chemical imbalance produced by the anesthetic effect of alcohol on the central nervous system. Generally, alcohol overdose results in dilation of blood vessels in the brain (symptom: headache), a migration of water and potassium from individual cells to intercellular spaces (symptom: insatiable thirst), irritation of the stomach lining (symptom: gastric distress) and suppression of rapid eye movement during sleep following your festivities (symptom: fatigue). All in all, a series of highly unpleasant side effects.

No wonder, then, that we seek magical solutions to deal with the aftershocks of overdrinking. For example, Americans seem especially prone to attaching supernatural powers to black coffee as a hangover healer. Unfortunately, it isn't. Perhaps the rising cost of coffee is destined to dispel this particular myth, but for now re-

member that no drug (i.e. caffeine) will hasten the elimination of alcohol from your body or counteract its effects. All that coffee will do — be it instant Maxwell House or freshly ground Guatemalan — is stimulate an already exhausted nervous system and prevent much needed slumber. And as for using a morning-after drink as an alcohol antidote (the "hair of the dog that bit you" theory) — don't.



the student body

BY KATHY CRAFT
Of the Emerald

Although adding more alcohol to your system occasionally provides superficial (and short-lived) relief, it ultimately multiplies your recovery time.

Increasing numbers of drinkers seem to be placing their faith in the power of preventative rather than relying on after-the-fact hangover remedies. For example, many drinkers maintain that salt tablets (taken before your evening out) will prevent dehydration. Others advise pre-party doses of Vitamin B1 (thiamin) to prevent problems

the following A.M. There is considerable disagreement over the thiamin theory. Even though chronic alcoholics tend to develop severe vitamin deficiencies and are often treated with thiamin to control DT's, there is no solid evidence to indicate Vitamin B1 is useful in dealing with hangovers.

Coating the stomach with milk prior to drinking is another measure recommended by many to help you stay sober and avoid stomach irritation. Although milk probably won't help, an over-the-counter antacid (such as Maalox) probably will. And, in general, eating before and during your drinking debauches is a good idea — especially fatty, high-protein foods such as cheese and nuts. Also, drink slowly — for this will also decrease the impact of alcohol on your body.

Many people believe that "congeners," the chemical substances which are produced along with ethyl alcohol during the process of fermentation, distillation and aging of liquors, are the major cause of hangovers. The number and concentration of these by-products vary from liquor to liquor, it is possible that certain spirits result in longer lasting, more acute hangovers. Vodka is said to contain fewer congeners, but since this theory is still disputed, don't down six screwdrivers tonight and expect to feel fine tomorrow morning.

From the Doctor:



Arsenic poisoning may lurk in wells

Dear Dr. Copperman:

I have had an upset stomach for over a month now and recently I seem to be developing a cold as well. I live out of town and my neighbor said I might have arsenic poisoning. I have taken Maalox and antihistamines without any relief. How can I find out if it is really arsenic. Is someone poisoning me?

Desperate

Dear Desperate:

If you live to the south and east of Eugene, "someone" may indeed be poisoning you but "he" did his work eons ago. Volcanic activity in the Cascades scattered mineral ash over a wide area at a time when the ocean shore ran north-south, almost right through Eugene. That ash, which landed on solid ground, was incorporated into a rock strata called the Fisher formation and within part of that ash, there was a large amount of arsenic.

The arsenic, which landed on the ocean was dissolved, as was most of the arsenic close to the surface and in the river and stream valleys. However, the water in some wells, south and east of Eugene in the Fisher formation, has been found to contain toxic quantities of arsenic. If you want to find the evil man in the long, dark cloak, who may be poisoning you, I suggest that you look in your well.

The arsenic problem in Lane County was discovered in 1962 and since that time, the County Environmental Health Department has done widespread testing of both the municipal water supplies and private well water supplies. There is no danger at all from city water, which is obtained from the Willamette, since the arsenic was leached out thousands of years ago. Nor is there any danger from occasional ingestion of well water that is contaminated, since the body will safely eliminate small doses of arsenic over one to two months. However, constant ingestion of contaminated water does allow arsenic to build up in the body and can lead to problems.

I don't know if you have arsenic poisoning or if you have just had an upset stomach and a cold. If you have been drinking water from a well, though, you should have your urine tested for arsenic and your water tested by the County.

The effects of acute, severe poisoning with arsenic are very dramatic and are effectively portrayed in various movies and books. Within one to twelve hours of being poisoned, the person may begin to choke and be unable to swallow. Excruciating stomach pain occurs, followed by vomiting, which may become blood-tinted. Diarrhea occurs, first thin, then "rice water", then bloody. Circulatory shock occurs and the person may die, usually in about 12 to 24 hours after being poisoned.

If you are a king or prime minister, or if you like to chew on ant and rat poison, you may be susceptible to those symptoms. If they occur, please call your doctor.

Chronic poisoning is rare but Lane County is one of the places it occurs. If you rely on well water for your drinking supply and live to the south or east of Eugene, you should have your water tested.

Since arsenic is a component of the insecticide used on cherry orchards, contamination of water is theoretically possible from this source. Usually, any exposure from insecticides is very minor and no clinical cases of poisoning from this source have been reported in Lane County.

Arsenic in drug form was used medicinally in the early part of this century, quite extensively. It was the first effective drug developed against syphilis. Large doses were often employed in an attempt to eradicate the disease. The cure, as you might imagine, was almost as bad as the disease.

Currently, arsenic still has a place in the veterinary treatment of some worm diseases. I don't recommend Lane well water as a syphilitic cure, however, so if you are worried about either your water or your syphilis, do come in and be checked.

Terry Copperman, M.D.
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