

Hangovers payment for previous night's fun

By Kym Gilhooly
Emerald Contributor

You wake up feeling as though Custer's Last Stand took place in your head. Predictably you vow never to drink again.

If it makes you feel any better, your condition probably has been experienced by most people at one time or another. In France, the malady is called "gueule de bois" or "mouth of wood." The Germans call it "Katzenjammer" or "wailing of cats."

In plain English, you've got a hangover.

Why does the same substance that made you the life of the party last night leave you a miserable wretch the morning after?

Dr. Jim Jackson, director of the Student Health Center, said alcohol has a powerful effect on the body because it affects multiple organ systems.

Alcohol is a small molecule that passes easily through the body's filter system known as the "blood brain barrier," a "screen" that allows only the simplest molecules through. Once in the brain,

alcohol acts as a sedative.

"Paradoxically, the drinker feels sociable and witty, although the so-called higher functions of the brain are being depressed," Jackson said.

The higher functions of the brain are susceptible to alcohol because it tends to attack the brain's most sophisticated areas.

The liver extracts alcohol from the blood and converts it to a toxic chemical called acetaldehyde. The liver then converts the acetaldehyde into acetate, and finally into carbon dioxide and water.

Acetaldehyde is 50 to 100 times as toxic as alcohol itself.

A number of things can contribute to the nausea associated with a hangover.

"Alcohol is an irritant, and can cause gastritis of the stomach," Jackson said. "It can wear down the mucous lining of the stomach and actually cause bleeding."

Dehydration is another contributing factor to hangover misery, Jackson added.

Alcohol inhibits the anti-diuretic hormone that keeps the body from eliminating too much water through urination.



Graphic by Jarrett Jester

In essence, Jackson said, alcohol "tells the cells to give up fluids," which results in the excessive thirst a drinker feels.

Another clue to the cause of the morning-after nausea may be the toxins that remain in the body after overindulging.

Carbon dioxide buildup may be another cause — the cells simply aren't getting enough oxygen.

The best cure for a nagging hangover is time, Jackson said, also recommending "rest, fluids, an ice pack and Tylenol."

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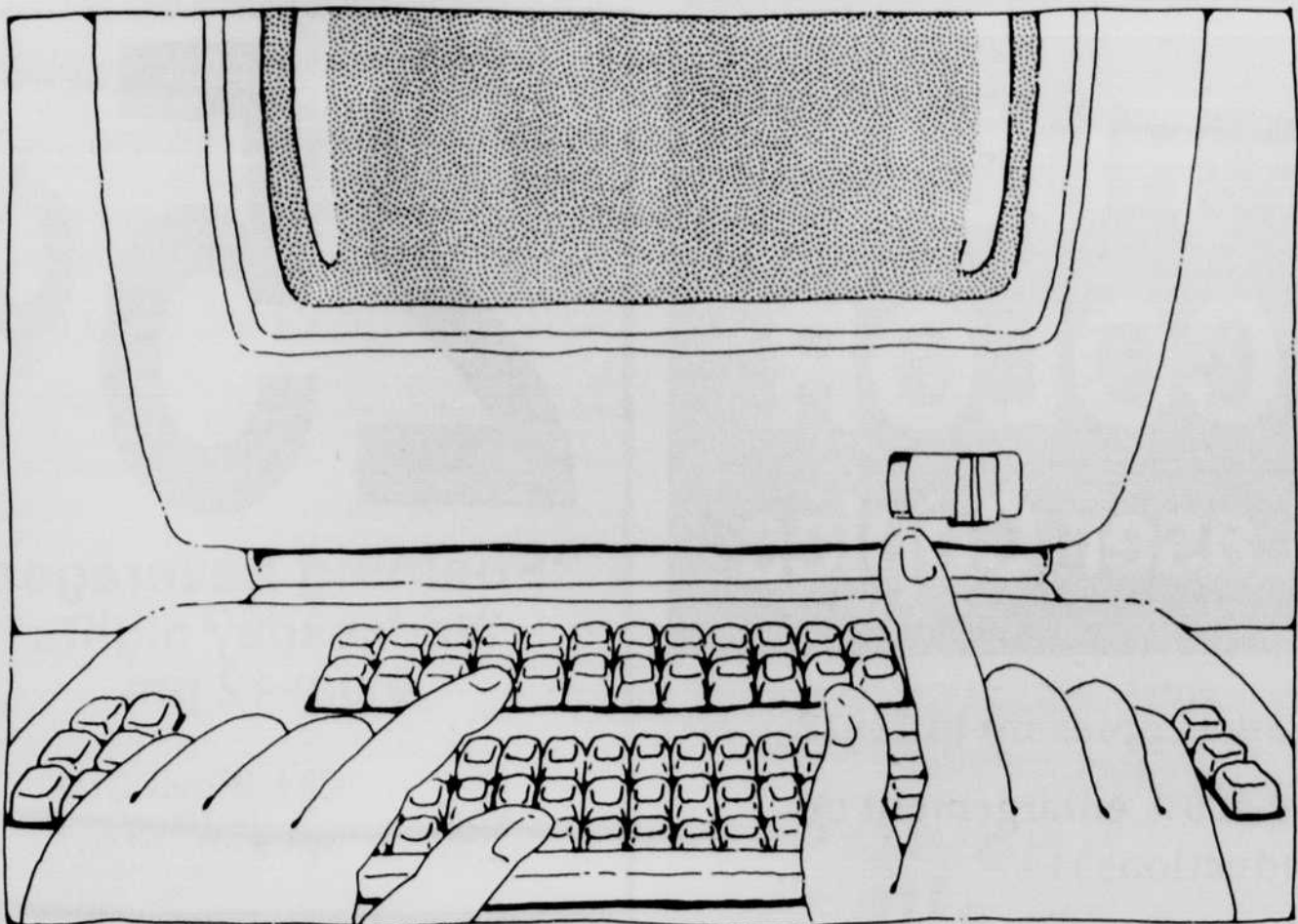
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