



Published on *Go Ask Alice!* (<https://goaskalice.columbia.edu>)

[Home](#) > [Avoid hangover?](#)

Avoid hangover? ^[1]

Dear Alice,

What can be done to reduce the effects of a hangover? I heard that drinking water before going to bed will help.

— Aching Head

Answer

Dear Aching Head,

Most people don't enjoy the morning-after hangover — many experience an upset stomach, headaches, shakiness, thirst, body aches and pains, among other feelings that can follow a night of heavy drinking. The only surefire way to avoid a hangover is to pass on libations altogether. However, if you do choose to drink, consuming alcohol in moderation can help reduce the likelihood of a hangover. Drinking in moderation consists of drinking up to one drink per day for those assigned female at birth and up to two drinks per day for those assigned male at birth. While drinking water before bed may help the next day, it still won't change how much alcohol has already been consumed. There are no special tricks that can mitigate the effects of heavy drinking once the alcohol is already in the system, but there are some ways to slow down the rate at which alcohol is absorbed into the body.

The chances of experiencing a hangover significantly increases as the number of drinks imbibed increases, especially when those drinks are consumed in a short period of time (such as with drinking games). The quick consumption of larger quantities of alcohol not only increases the chances of hangovers, but other health risks, such as alcohol poisoning. So, pacing — having no more than one drink per hour — is generally recommended as a lower-risk way to drink for most people. When keeping track of drinks, it's good to remember that all drinks aren't created equal — one standard drink of alcohol is generally equivalent to twelve ounces of beer, five ounces of wine, or one to one and a half ounces of liquor. It may also find it helpful to think about what type of alcohol is being consumed. Drinks with larger amounts of congeners (molecules produced during the fermentation process that can have toxic effects), such as brandy or whiskey, are more likely to lead to a hangover than a lighter colored alcohol. However, regardless of the color of the alcohol, consuming too much may lead to a hangover.

Some strategies to reduce the rate at which alcohol is absorbed into the system include:

- Drinking slowly
- Sipping rather than gulping
- Diluting alcoholic drinks with non-alcohol beverages (such as adding water to drinks)
- Avoiding shots
- Alternating alcoholic with non-alcoholic beverages (such as alternating alcoholic beverages with juice)
- Eating a substantial meal before drinking and snack while drinking

When a hangover happens, it may be due to a number of mechanisms. These symptoms could be the result of alcohol's diuretic effect, increasing the need to urinate. Because more liquid is released from the body, it's a good idea to hydrate with water and other non-alcoholic, non-carbonated, non-caffeinated drinks, both while consuming alcohol and afterwards. Alcohol also can also cause a number of responses in the body, such as the expansion of blood vessels and an inflammatory response from the immune system. The expansion of blood vessels may lead to the headaches many describe as part of their hangovers, while the inflammatory response could trigger the concentration and memory problems. For more information on how to *prevent* a hangover, check out the [Alcohol & Other Drugs](#) ^[2] category in the *Go Ask Alice!* archives.

For those who wind up feeling sick despite precautionary measures, there are some steps that may help reduce the malaise. Taking ibuprofen before going to bed or upon waking could help calm any inflammation that may be causing aches and pains (but be careful as this could make an upset stomach worse). Before taking, be sure to read the label carefully and take only the recommended dosage. It's best to avoid taking acetaminophen after drinking, as the combination can have harmful effects on the liver. Drinking two to three glasses of water before hitting the sack, as you mention, could also help improve hydration. Additionally, while it may seem simple, going to sleep may also help. While these measures may help to relieve headache and other aches and pains, they don't decrease the amount of alcohol in the body, so hangover symptoms may still be felt for the next 24 hours.

Eating a meal or a mild snack could also help improve a hangover, as long as the stomach feels up to eating. Though the food doesn't actually absorb the alcohol, it may help to soothe an upset stomach and replace lost nutrients such as salt and potassium. It's worth noting that the amount

of alcohol that causes a hangover for each person can vary. Some may experience a hangover after one drink, while others may not experience hangovers at all, even after drinking heavily. Aching Head, what does a typical night of drinking look like for you? If you have concerns about your alcohol consumption (or that of your friends or family), you may consider speaking with your health care provider, who could offer a referral to a substance abuse specialist. You can also checkout [Rethinking Drinking](#) [3] to explore more about your drinking behaviors.

Cheers to healthy drinking!

Alice!

Category:

[Alcohol & Other Drugs](#) [4]

[Alcohol](#) [5]

Related questions

[Hangover-helping product?](#) [6]

[Drinking for stress relief — A problem?](#) [7]

[Alcohol and liver damage](#) [8]

Resources

[Medical Services \(Morningside\)](#) [9]

[Columbia Health BASICS program \(Morningside\)](#) [10]

[Medical Services \(CUIMC\)](#) [11]

[Student Health on Haven BASICS program \(CUIMC\)](#) [12]

Published date:

Nov 30, 1993

Last reviewed on:

Jul 12, 2019

Footer menu

- ▼ [Contact Alice!](#)
 - [Content Use](#)
 - [Media Inquiries](#)
 - [Comments & Corrections](#)
- ▼ [Syndication & Licensing](#)
 - [Licensing Q&As](#)
 - [Get Alice! on Your Website](#)
 - [Full Site Syndication](#)
 - [Link to Go Ask Alice!](#)

Go Ask Alice! is not an emergency or instant response service.

If you are in an urgent situation, please visit our Emergency page to view a list of 24 hour support services and hotlines.

Source URL: <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/avoid-hangover-1>

Links

- [1] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/avoid-hangover-1>
- [2] <http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/alcohol-other-drugs>
- [3] <https://www.rethinkingdrinking.niaaa.nih.gov/>
- [4] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/alcohol-other-drugs>
- [5] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/alcohol>
- [6] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/hangover-helping-product-0>
- [7] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/drinking-stress-relief-%E2%80%94-problem-0>
- [8] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/alcohol-and-liver-damage>
- [9] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/resource/medical-services-morningside>
- [10] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/resource/columbia-health-basics-program-morningside>
- [11] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/resource/medical-services-cuimc>
- [12] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/resource/student-health-haven-basics-program-cuimc>