

Hangover helper and tips for healthy drinking ^[1]

Dear Alice,

Do you have any tips for avoiding hangovers?

— Hungover

Answer

Dear Hungover,

Avoiding a hangover is a great goal to have! Many folks who participate in moderate or higher-risk drinking ^[2] experience a hangover at some point (though some people can experience one with just a single drink). A hangover isn't just one symptom; it's a set of possible symptoms a person may experience after consuming alcohol. With a bit of planning, symptoms can be minimized when drinking alcohol. Before getting into how to avoid a hangover, it may be helpful to cover why consuming alcohol can lead to undesirable symptoms. Some of the changes that alcohol causes in the body include:

- Dehydration
- Stomach irritation
- Decrease in your blood sugar
- Blood vessel expansion
- Increased tiredness, but poor sleep quality
- Inflammatory response from your immune system

Adapted from Mayo Clinic ^[3].

As a result, hangover symptoms can include headaches, nausea, diarrhea, fatigue, dry mouth, and body aches. But there are protective behaviors that you can engage in to minimize the symptoms of a hangover! Some popular practices on how to do just that could include:

- **Alternate your drinks.** You could get your party started with an alcoholic drink, but then drink some water or juice before having another (remembering to pace yourself along the way). This can help keep you hydrated. However, it's wise to avoid switching off with

carbonated drinks — they may speed up intoxication and heighten hangovers.

- **Hold that line.** It may be useful to set and state a drink max before you start drinking, and challenge yourself to hold that line. Since you're asking this question, you may be familiar with how your body reacts to consuming alcohol and you might already know the point when the alcohol you've consumed begins to cause noticeable physical and psychological effects. Crossing your line may increase your chances of a hangover.
- **Pace yourself.** To minimize your risk, sticking to about one standard drink ^[4] per hour is advised. This rate gives your body a chance to process the alcohol. Rapid consumption of alcohol via shots, funnels, and drinking games may just win you a big hangover. Additionally, it's a good idea to try to limit yourself to no more than three to four drinks in a 24-hour period.
- **Consider the congeners.** Congeners are natural by-products of alcohol fermentation. The higher the congener content, the greater the risk of a hangover. Gin and vodka have the fewest congeners, while bourbon and red wine claim the most.
- **Chow down.** You may consider eating a substantial meal before you drink. Bread products and foods high in protein, such as milk and cheese, slow the absorption of alcohol into the bloodstream by coating your stomach and small intestine. Nibbling on finger foods throughout the night may also slow the intoxication process.
- **Have another drink... of water.** Yes, this was covered earlier, but it bears repeating! Drink plenty of water during and after alcohol use to ward off dehydration, headaches, and achiness.

Along with the safer drinking behaviors already discussed, it may help to also consider why you're drinking. Reducing stress, releasing anger, or trying to prove yourself to someone may be motivations that may increase how quickly you consume, thereby potentially increasing possible nasty side effects. If these are reasons you find yourself drinking, you may be interested in coping with these feelings ^[5] in other ways.

For more information on lower-risk drinking, you could check out the Alcohol ^[6] category of the Go Ask Alice! Alcohol & Other Drugs ^[7] archives. Following these tips can help you enjoy your drinks... as well as the next morning.

Cheers,

Alice!

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- [3] <http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/hangovers/basics/causes/con-20025464>
- [4] <https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/alcohol-health/overview-alcohol-consumption/what-standard-drink>
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