

No hangovers = problem? ^[1]

Dear Alice,

I never get hungover, yet I am a light female. You guys say that this is a sign of a serious problem, please explain.

— Hangover Free

Answer

Dear Hangover Free,

A hangover refers to the unpleasant physical and mental symptoms (such as headache, thirst from dehydration, nausea/vomiting, decreased attention and concentration, decreased sleep, and so on) that are felt after a bout of heavy alcohol drinking. There are a multitude of factors that impact how a person reacts to alcohol, including whether s/he gets a hangover or not. Generally, as the amount and duration of alcohol consumed increases, so does the likelihood a hangover and severity of hangover symptoms.

If you're light in weight, you may begin to feel the effects of alcohol after drinking only a small amount of alcohol. Feeling the effects of alcohol more readily than your friends who might weigh more may lead you to drink less alcohol on any given occasion, which could explain your lack of hangovers. Along those same lines, drinking moderately or lightly is a plausible explanation for not having any hangovers (In fact, many other readers will probably be jealous; just refer to all the *Go Ask Alice!* questions about cures for hangovers!).

Other factors that may decrease the likelihood of experiencing a hangover include:

- Having eaten food, which will slow down absorption of the alcohol
- Drinking water between alcoholic drinks to stay hydrated
- Choosing not to combine medications and alcohol
- Consuming lighter-colored drinks — darker drinks have more congeners which increase the chances of having a hangover (that being said, if you consume a large number of lighter-colored drinks, you could still get a hangover)

List adapted from the Mayo Clinic [2].

If you are a heavy drinker, then your lack of hangovers could be a sign that your body is addicted to and dependent on alcohol to function normally (for a female, heavy drinking is considered eight or more drinks every week). In this case, you may feel physical withdrawal [3] symptoms when you *discontinue* drinking alcohol, but you may not experience hangover symptoms after drinking alcohol.

Alcohol dependence [4] is a common sign of alcohol abuse. No matter how much or how little alcohol you're drinking, if alcohol use is contributing to problems for you (such as damaging relationships with family or friends, or hindering your ability to perform well in school or at work), then you may want to consider seeing a counselor to further explore your relationship with alcohol. Simply not having hangovers in general is not a sign of a serious problem. However, if the reason you aren't getting hangovers is because your body is dependent on alcohol, then this could be a problem. Only you will know if your alcohol use is problematic. Hopefully this clarifies anything that was unclear before.

Alice!

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Related questions

Hangover helper and tips for healthy drinking [7]

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Avoid hangover? [9]

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Resources

Counseling and Psychological Services (CPS) (Morningside) [11]

Mental Health Services (CUIMC) [12]

Anonymous Alcohol Self-Assessment [13]

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