Hi Alice,

Recently (the last six months or so) I've been getting really tired after a couple of drinks (let's say three or four). By eleven at night, I'm ready to call it quits. My friends and boyfriend poke fun at me because I usually head home before they do. How can I last longer in a healthy way? I definitely try to drink water throughout the night, but is there anything else?

Thanks!

Asleep before midnight

Answer

Dear Asleep before midnight,

Feeling drowsy after three or four drinks close to midnight is completely normal — alcohol is a depressant that reduces alertness and increases sleepiness. Many factors help contribute to sleepiness when drinking, including (but not limited to) fatigue, illness, and the use of other drugs/medications. Fortunately, there are ways to maximize the fun of partying (or staying sober) while also maintaining a good night’s sleep and avoiding a hangover.

As you anticipate your next foray into night life, there are ways to address and minimize sleepiness before you head for the door, while you’re hanging out, when you’re ready to go home for the night. Consider the following action items when pondering potential plans:

- Clock in plenty of hours of sleep throughout the week to prevent the effects of sleep deprivation.
- Take an afternoon or evening nap the day of the gathering to refresh your mind and body.
- Eat before and during drinking. Consider snacks with complex carbohydrates (whole grains, fruits, veggies, and beans) to keep your energy up.
- Plan to head out earlier in the evening to prevent fatigue later in the night.
- Have a check-in with yourself and determine whether you really want to go or not. Not into it tonight? Consider staying in (did someone say movies, popcorn, or a good book?) or suggesting an alternative plan for a fun night.
Once you’re out and about:

- Move around or hit the dance floor! Keeping your blood pumping will help you feel awake. Just make sure to hydrate with water when engaging in physical activity, especially if the environment is warm.
- Alternate alcohol and non-alcohol drinks throughout the night. In addition to water, try club soda, juice, or a soft drink with a lime wedge or maraschino cherry.
- Though caffeine beforehand may be initially helpful, steer clear of caffeinated alcoholic drinks, which can mask the effects of intoxication until the caffeine wears off.
- Want to go out, but don’t want to drink? Just nix the alcohol and stick with the previously mentioned water, club soda, juice, or soft drinks while you spend time with your crew.

When you decide you want to call it a night:

- Make a smooth, but resolute exit once you’re ready to leave. Say goodnight to your friends and boyfriend and be firm in your decision to head home.
- Better yet, have a friend leave with you — there’s power in numbers, and you’ll have a travel partner!

Beyond these strategies, it’s also good to think about whether the pressure coming from your friends and boyfriend is an acceptable reason to stay out later than you’d like. If your friends and boyfriend are just teasing you in a playful way, they might respond well to a quirky response, such as “Alright kiddos, granny’s off to bed!” or “I’m too tired to hit the bars — I’d rather hit the hay.” However, if the pressure is more serious, you might try making a simple, honest, and straightforward statement, like “I’m really exhausted, and I won’t be much fun if I don’t get to bed soon.” If that doesn’t work, you might reevaluate your social circle and seek out friends who are more supportive of your needs and sleep habits.

If you’re concerned about your recent difficulty in staying up late, you might also consider scheduling an appointment with your health care provider. They can help determine whether you recent sleepiness is a result of an underlying medical condition. To learn more about the topics at hand, take a look at some Q&As in the Go Ask Alice! Sleep [2] and Alcohol [3] archives.

Alice!
Category: Alcohol & Other Drugs [4]
Alcohol [5]
General Health [6]
Sleep [7]

Related questions

- Hangover helper and tips for healthy drinking [8]
- How do I drink in moderation? [9]
- Decreasing amount of sleep needed [10]
- Short sleep + long naps = Healthy? [11]