

# How to Cope With Holiday Hangovers

By Lynn C. Allison

**T**is the season to be jolly, but when it gets a little too jolly, that joy may be hindered by a hangover. Too much alcohol can cause nasty post-party symptoms such as headaches, nausea, fatigue, weakness, and increased blood pressure.

The effects of a hangover can vary from person to person, according to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. Peak symptoms, which can last 24 hours or longer, end when the blood alcohol level concentration in the body returns to zero. While hangovers are notoriously miserable, they can also be dangerous because the symptoms can impair a person's ability to make decisions or drive safely.

Alexander Mauskop, M.D., a board-certified neurologist and director and founder of the New York Headache Center, says that magnesium depletion and dehydration are two likely factors for hangovers.

In fact, Mauskop tells *Health Radar* that taking a magnesium supplement before going to bed after imbibing can help prevent a hangover. Taking a second supplement the next morning along with Advil may ease symptoms.

"It is not a good idea to take Advil, and especially Tylenol, while still having alcohol in the bloodstream," he warns. "Advil with alcohol increases the risk of stomach ulcers, and alcohol with Tylenol is damaging to the liver."

Mauskop says that drinking more alcohol the next day, a hangover myth commonly called "hair of the dog," will absolutely not help. It merely masks the symptoms.

Amanda Beaver, a registered dietitian with Houston Methodist Wellness Services, adds that hangovers can be triggered by inflammation caused by acetaldehyde, which is produced by the liver when it breaks down alcohol.

"This compound causes inflammation in various organs including the brain and the gastrointestinal tract," Beaver tells *Health Radar*. Disruption of deep, restful sleep also contributes to hangovers.

Alcoholic drinks contain congeners, compounds produced during the fermentation of alcohol, that exacerbate hangovers. Darker spirits such as whiskey and brandy tend to have higher levels of congeners than clear spirits such as vodka and gin.

"It can be easy to drink more during the holiday season due to peer pressure and social norms," says Beaver. However, these tips can help you handle the holiday season hangover-free:

- **Stay hydrated.** Remember that alcohol is a diuretic, so you lose more fluids when you drink it. Have a glass of water between alcoholic beverages or switch to sparkling water. "There are so many deliciously flavored nonalcoholic drinks to enjoy," says Beaver, who suggests that if you are hosting a party, keep these options open for your guests, including "mocktails," that can be just as enjoyable as the real thing. Experts say that enjoying a sports drink that contains electrolytes can help replenish the minerals lost by drinking too much alcohol.

- **Eat before you drink.** Lyssie Lakatos, a registered dietitian, says that consuming vegetables, protein, and healthy carbohydrates before drinking slows the digestion of alcohol so it doesn't enter your bloodstream as quickly. "This gives your body a chance to metabolize alcohol," she says.

- **Set a drink limit.** "That way, as the drinks are flowing, you will have a plan with a set number of drinks in your head, rather than accepting each drink that comes your way," Lakatos tells *Health Radar*.

- **Eat a breakfast with banana and peanut butter.** Try a morning-after meal of whole grain toast with peanut butter and a banana. "A banana the morning after a night of heavy drinking replaces lost electrolytes, especially potassium," she says. "With the peanut butter, you'll get the fat you crave, but it's a healthy fat that helps stabilize blood sugar to negate some of the ill effects of the hangover." Whole grain toast provides the boost you need for longer lasting energy. Avoid eating sugar, which causes your blood sugar level to spike and crash. And stay away from saturated fat that takes a long time to digest, causing a feeling of sluggishness and heaviness. □