- Drinking of alcoholic beverages

PREVENTION

WELLNESS

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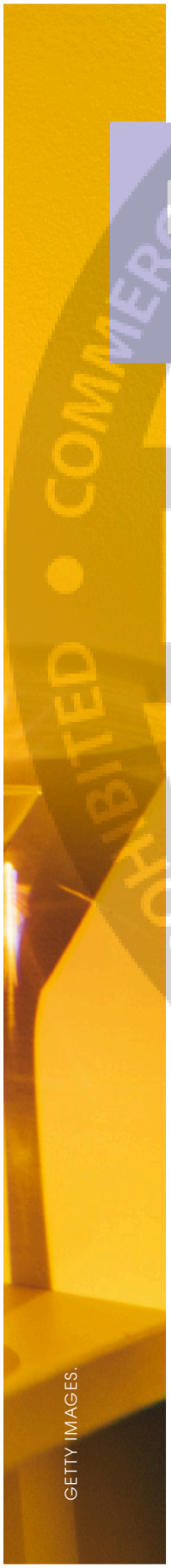
5 MYTHS ABOUT

HANGOVERS

If last night's ale is still ailing you, you'll do anything to quench the throb. Here's the truth about the morning after, so you can recover fast.

BY KATE ROCKWOOD



GETTY IMAGES.

1

MYTH:

Beer before liquor, never been sicker.

MYTHBUSTER

No matter how catchy the rhyme, it's the quantity you drink—and how fast you drink it—that matters, not the order of consumption, says Keri Peterson, M.D., an internist with a private practice in New York City. Any "standard drink"—whether it is 12 oz of beer, a 5-oz glass of wine, or 1.5 oz of liquor—contains about the same amount of alcohol. It is true, though, that lighter-colored alcoholic beverages may lead to fewer hangovers, as they contain fewer congeners (compounds that research shows contribute to hangovers). But as anybody who's had one too many G&Ts can attest, "drinking too many alcoholic beverages of any color will still leave you feeling hungover," says Dr. Peterson, whether you start with spirits and then move to wine or beer or do the reverse.

2

MYTH:

The hair of the dog that bit you will set you right.

MYTHBUSTER

A morning-after Bloody Mary is a temporary solution that will probably make things worse later on, says John Brick, Ph.D., an alcohol researcher and the executive director of Intoxikon International. That's because hangover symptoms kick in as your blood alcohol level drops, and you feel your worst when none is left in your system, says Dr. Peterson. This means that after you metabolize the Bloody Mary, the hangover will come roaring back. Dehydration can also contribute to a hangover, and next-day drinking could cause greater loss of water and electrolytes, Brick says. To recover, drink water or sports drinks and eat something bland and easily digestible like toast with jam. Also, "some gentle exercise will flood cells with oxygen and release mood-boosting endorphins," Dr. Peterson adds.

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3

MYTH: Sulfites cause red wine hangovers.

MYTHBUSTER

Sensitivity to sulfites is relatively rare. These preservatives in wine, beer, shrimp, potatoes, and dried fruit have long been blamed for the dreaded "red wine headache," but only between 1 in 40 and 1 in 100 people have a bad reaction to them, and that finding applies just to people with asthma. A new UC Davis study suggests a different culprit in wine—a naturally occurring polyphenol called quercetin. When ingested in alcohol, quercetin can cause a buildup of the toxin acetaldehyde, which interferes with how the body metabolizes alcohol. "The buildup of acetaldehyde or other chemicals may be a factor in hangovers," Brick says. High levels of acetaldehyde cause familiar hangover symptoms like headache, flushing, and nausea. Hangovers are complex, with causes from dehydration to congeners to alcohol-disrupted sleep, Brick says, and for most drinkers, sulfites are probably not to blame.



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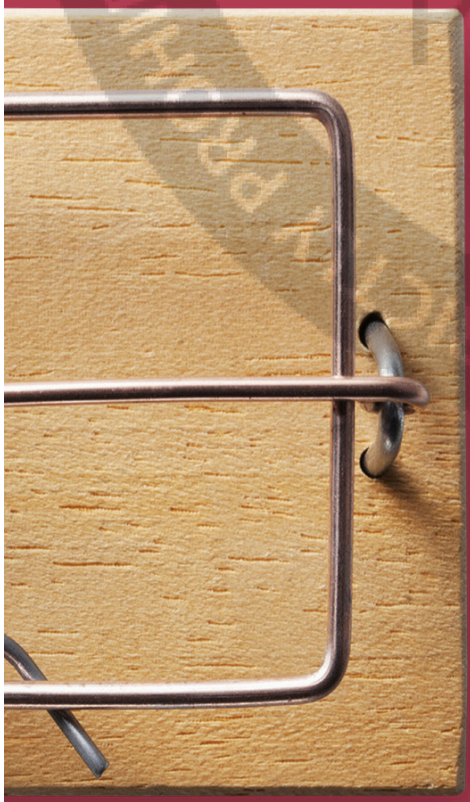
4

MYTH:

Pop a pain reliever before bed to feel better the next day.

MYTHBUSTER

Taking a pain reliever before you have a hangover won't help much. The effect of ibuprofen, for example, peaks after one or two hours, the FDA reports, and if you go to bed drunk there will be no pain to alleviate, says Brick, who also points out that the effect will have largely worn off by the time you awaken. Another reason to wait is that an OTC pain reliever might irritate an already upset stomach. Still, these drugs are useful—once you have a hangover, they can help ease headaches and achiness. One you should steer clear of, though, is acetaminophen (Tylenol). "Acetaminophen places an extra burden on the liver, and high doses, in combination with alcohol, may increase the risk of liver damage," Brick says.



5

MYTH:

If you eat greasy food, it can "soak up the alcohol" and help you dodge a hangover.

MYTHBUSTER **A post-party or a.m. diner stop might seem like a good idea,** but greasy, fatty food can make a queasy stomach or heartburn even worse, Brick says. Food does slow the absorption of alcohol, but only if you start eating *before* you begin drinking. "Drinking the same amount, you'll become less intoxicated if you drink on a full stomach as opposed to with little or no food in your stomach," he says. Your best bet is to eat something hearty that contains fat, which takes longer to digest and "causes alcohol to be delivered to your bloodstream more slowly, giving it less of a chance to reach high levels," Dr. Peterson says.

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