

Hangover HELPERS

It's the most wonderful time of the year, unless you have a hangover. Here's how to minimize the misery.

Story by Nancy Moreland

Ah, the holidays ... the season of festive fun and good cheer, holiday parties and hangovers. Your stomach feels like you ate an entire Christmas fruitcake and the little drummer boy is practicing percussion inside your head. If your calendar is crammed with social obligations, heed Dawn Orsaeo's advice before dashing off to your next soiree. An Orlando-based registered dietitian, Orsaeo, who regularly appears on WOFL-Fox 35, shares advice for hangover prevention and recovery.

CHEMISTRY 101

Even a tipsy reveler can do the math: One too many adds up to awful aftereffects — headache, nausea, dizziness, fatigue. Winter celebrations may have caused your suffering, but you're feeling like the victim of a Halloween witch's brew.

"When you drink alcohol, it hits your liver, the powerhouse of your body, where it's broken

down into a chemical called acetaldehyde. The liver then uses an enzyme called acetaldehyde dehydrogenase and an antioxidant called glutathione to further break down the acetaldehyde. When we drink too much, those enzymes and antioxidants are depleted, allowing acetaldehyde to build up. We don't process alcohol as well and that brings on a hangover," Orsaeo says, adding, "Women have less enzymes and antioxidants than men, so we feel the effects of alcohol faster."

A PARTY PLAN

'Tis the season to be jolly, but avoid the folly of a hangover by not drinking on an empty stomach. "Have a healthy snack before leaving for the party, so you're not starving when you arrive. Also, eat something with your drink to slow the absorption of alcohol," says Orsaeo. She also suggests alternating alcoholic beverages with water.



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No regrets? Hope that party was worth it. The only true cure for a hangover is time — and maybe some shut eye.

“It slows down your alcohol intake and counteracts some of the dehydration.”

If bourbon, scotch, tequila, dark beer or red wine is your drink of choice, think again. Darker drinks have higher levels of congeners. Those chemical compounds have a Grinch-like ability to spoil your holiday mood because they’re more likely to cause a hangover. Stick to clear alcohols such as gin, vodka or white wine. To keep the sugarplum fairies from dancing inside your brain, avoid sugary soda mixers or flavored vodkas. They’ll induce more dehydration. Opt for seltzer or club soda mixers instead.

REHYDRATE AND RESTORE

If you find yourself hungover despite your best intentions, Orsaeo recommends reaching for beverages that “rehydrate and restore electrolytes such as Gatorade G2, low-sugar Powerade or Pedialyte.” Trendy partiers can sip coconut water, as long as it isn’t sugar-flavored. The one beverage you shouldn’t drink is more alcohol. Despite what you’ve heard, a “hair of the dog” just takes a bigger bite of your electrolytes. It may delay the inevitable, but it prolongs dehydration.

Even if you no longer believe in Santa, you may fall for a mythical hangover cure. “A greasy breakfast is one of the worst things you can eat. It brings on more heartburn and nausea,” Orsaeo says. Instead, eat kinder, gentler foods. In addition to being easy on your stomach, bananas, applesauce, scrambled eggs, cereal or yogurt restore some of the vital nutrients your body lost while drinking. If the thought of solid food frightens you more than January’s credit card bill, try chicken soup or miso broth.

Hoping a Christmas miracle will fix your hangover? Don’t look in the medicine cabinet. “There’s little evidence to back up the claims of herbal supplements, and there’s a risk they’ll interact with medication you might be taking. Alka-Seltzer helps a little, but take just one tablet in a small glass of water, have a few sips and see



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—Dawn Orsaeo,
registered dietitian

how you feel,” cautions Orsaeo. While the baking soda in Alka-Seltzer settles your stomach, it also contains aspirin and citric acid that may aggravate an upset stomach.

For headaches, physicians suggest an anti-inflammatory like ibuprofen, but follow the recommended dosage and always take it with food.

Caffeine, the elixir of life for parents of small children and journalists on deadline, may or may not help a hangover. “If you’re used to drinking coffee, it’s better to have a cup than to bring on a caffeine-withdrawal headache,” Orsaeo says. If you’re not a java junkie, don’t start now. Ginger tea or ginger root steeped in hot water is a better brew. According to Orsaeo, ginger, whether tea, candied ginger or flat ginger ale, alleviates nausea.

EXERCISE CAUTION

Tempted to heal your hangover with a workout? “Depending on how bad you feel and how dehydrated you are, you should rest as much as possible. If you’re up to it, a little walking, biking or yoga won’t hurt and can increase your circulation,” Orsaeo says. Whatever you do, don’t sweat out your symptoms in a sauna. “A sauna increases dehydration and raises blood pressure, which can be dangerous.”

Ultimately, time is the only true cure for a hangover. As the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche said, “That which doesn’t kill us makes us stronger.” Like you, he probably attended one too many holiday parties. ●