Alcohol and Headaches

Alcohol is a chemical known as ethanol. It is found in beverages such as beer, wine and liquor. Greater amounts are often found in liquor such as whiskey, vodka, scotch, mixed drinks and others. These drinks can also contain chemicals called congeners. Both ethanol and the congeners can effect how the person feels after drinking it. These "after effects" are often referred to as a hangover. Hangovers are rare with moderate alcohol drinking (1-3 average drinks). However, hangovers increase when the amount of alcohol consumed is more than moderate.

SYMPTOMS

A hangover can be accompanied by:

- Headache.
- Upset stomach.
- Nausea and vomiting.
- Dehydration.

A hangover is actually a withdrawal state from moderate to heavy alcohol consumption. The recovery process will take longer if you attempt to relieve this withdrawal with more alcohol. Drinking caffeine may relieve some of the fatigue associated with a hangover. However, this can cause more stomach irritation. Caffeine also makes a person urinate more (*diuretic*) and can worsen dehydration.

TREATMENT

There are a few actions that can reduce a hangover's severity and length.

- Drink 1-2 glasses of water (16-24 ounces) after you have quite drinking alcohol.
- Use pain medicines carefully and as told by your caregiver. For a headache, avoid acetaminophen. This drug is hard on the liver. Take aspirin instead and drink more water. If aspirin causes more stomach upset, ibuprofen may be a second choice.
- Get rest.
- Avoid high-fat foods and consider eating bananas (restores potassium and magnesium that will help both your stomach and headache). Oranges, apples and pears are good choices too.
- Take vitamins. Alcohol depletes the body's stores of vitamins A, B (especially B6) and C, which can intensify hangover symptoms.
- Drink 16 ounces of water each hour. This will rehydrate your body and make you feel better. Sports drinks containing electrolytes may help your body rehydrate quicker than drinking water alone. The faster you restore proper fluid balance, the sooner you will feel better. Hydration is vital when treating a hangover.
- Exercise. As soon as you feel up to it, sweating helps remove toxins from the body faster.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- Hangovers become more frequent.
- Hangovers interfere with major life activities such as job, family, health and relationships.
- You are unable to control your drinking, professional help may be needed. Contact your physician for a referral to specialized treatment.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You throw up blood.
- You pass dark or tarry stools.
- Your headache worsens over the next 24 hours instead getting better.
- Your abdominal or stomach pain worsens instead of getting better over the next 24 hours.

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