

What's the best hangover cure? Truth be told, there isn't one

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(PhysOrg.com) -- With the holiday party season at hand, UNC's Dr. James C. Garbutt offers these tips about how to enjoy a few drinks responsibly -- while sparing yourself and those around you from the potentially disastrous consequences of overdoing it.

So you're heading out to the big holiday party, and you're planning to have fun.

And for you having fun means having a few drinks, whether it's [beer](#), [wine](#) or harder stuff, and maybe some champagne at midnight on New Year's Eve, too. Nothing wrong with that, as long as you don't overdo it. And most importantly, as long as you don't drive while impaired by alcohol.

Unfortunately, too many people will overdo it, and find themselves waking up on New Year's Day with a terrible splitting headache and a queasy stomach.

For those folks, the bad news is that while myths about hangover "cures" abound, there isn't a single one that has been scientifically proven to work, said James C. Garbutt, M.D., a professor of psychiatry in the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Medicine who specializes in alcoholism treatment and research.

"The most important message I would emphasize is that people shouldn't drink too much in the first place," said Garbutt, who is a member UNC's Bowles Center for Alcohol Studies. "Hangover is one negative consequence of excess [alcohol consumption](#) but there are many others, including accidents, which can be serious, loss of control over emotions such as anger or sadness, and bad decision-making exemplified by the classic office party gone wrong."

In addition, it's worth noting that drinking too much in a single night can result in fatal alcohol poisoning. In other words, you can literally drink yourself to death. If someone passes out after heavy drinking, that's a serious medical emergency and the person should be taken to the hospital right away, Garbutt said.

That being said, there are steps you can take to enjoy a few drinks responsibly and prevent getting a hangover.

"Eating food is an important element in reducing drinking and reducing risk of intoxication," Garbutt said. Eat a meal before you take your first sip of alcohol, he advises, and continue to take in food as the night wears on. Food, fats especially, help slow down the body's absorption of alcohol. But to truly be effective, the food must be in your stomach first. If you wait until you're feeling buzzed or tipsy to start eating, it's already

too late.

Another good way to pace yourself: After finishing a drink with alcohol, drink a glass of water before your next round. This will both dilute the concentration of alcohol in your blood and help prevent dehydration, Garbutt said.

And if you ignore this advice and end up with a hangover anyway, there are things you can do that, while not a cure, will aid in your recovery. For example, taking two ibuprofen just before you go to bed and then again when you wake up will help reduce your headache pain. But it's best to avoid aspirin, because alcohol can aggravate gastritis and aspirin can increase risk of gastric erosion and bleeding. "Put the two together and there might be increased risk of gastrointestinal bleeding," Garbutt said. You should also avoid acetaminophen, the active ingredient in Tylenol, because in some people taking this drug while [alcohol](#) is in their system can cause serious liver damage.

Rehydration is also very important, Garbutt said. Drinking a sports drink, such as Gatorade, will help both rehydrate you and replace salt and other electrolytes lost through the increased urination that drinking [alcohol](#) causes.

What about those hangover "cures" we've all heard about? Drinking coffee? Doesn't help. Hair of the dog that bit you (i.e., drinking one more round of whatever caused your hangover)? All that does is delay the start of your recovery. Eating a big, greasy bacon and egg breakfast, or any other legendary "morning after" meal? Might've helped if you'd eaten it before you started [drinking](#) ...

Provided by University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Medicine ([news](#) : [web](#))

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