

On Yak-a-mein soup, a.k.a, 'Old Sober'

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One of the Crescent City's time-honored traditions – a steaming bowl of Yak-a-mein Soup, a.k.a., "Old Sober"—after a night of partying in the French Quarter actually does have a basis in scientific fact. That was the word today from an overview of the chemistry of hangovers, presented as part of the 245th National Meeting & Exposition of the American Chemical Society.

Alyson E. Mitchell, Ph.D., said foods like Yak-a-mein—also spelled Yakmein, Yaka-mein and Yak-a-Men—have salts, protein and other ingredients that help people recover from the effects of imprudent consumption of alcohol. Although recipes vary, Yak-a-mein typically is made with a salty beef-and-soy-sauce-based broth; a carbohydrate source like noodles; protein from beef, chicken or shrimp; onions or chopped scallions; and sliced hard-boiled egg. Vendors often sell the soup from sidewalk carts during New Orleans festivals, and some restaurants have their own signature recipes.

"Folklore has it that American soldiers from New Orleans stationed in Korea in the 1950s learned to appreciate Yak-a-mein on the morning after, and brought a taste for it back home," said Mitchell. She is with the University of California at Davis. "It may be a good example of intuitive science—an effective remedy, and with the scientific basis revealed only years later."

Mitchell spoke on the [chemistry](#) and physiology of the [hangover](#) at a symposium, "Chemistry of the Bar," which connects with the ACS meeting's core theme, "The Chemistry of Energy and Food." Hundreds

of the 12,000 reports on new advances in science scheduled for presentation at the meeting relate to that theme.

What exactly is a hangover?

"Hangovers have been called a 'metabolic storm,'" said Mitchell. "They result from high blood levels of ethanol and the accompanying dehydration, direct toxic effects of the body's breakdown of alcohol into acetaldehyde and toxic effects of substances called congeners that are present in darkly colored liquor like scotch and bourbon."

Drinkers can try to avoid a hangover, or the more serious consequences of excessive drinking, with these suggestions from Mitchell:

- Eat eggs, which contain cysteine, which helps to remove acetyldehyde from the body.
- Drink broth because it contains salts that can help replace sodium, potassium and other salts lost in the urine due to the diuretic effect of alcohol. Sports drinks also may help.
- Take vitamin B1, which may help prevent the buildup of glutarate, a substance linked to the headache part of a hangover.
- Remember that the body can metabolize, or eliminate, about one-half ounce of pure alcohol per hour. So consume no more than one 12-ounce beer, five ounces of wine, or one ounce of distilled spirits each hour.
- Don't drink coffee, which is a diuretic and can worsen the dehydration caused by alcohol itself.
- Eat fatty foods prior to drinking. They help slow down absorption of alcohol.
- Avoid dark liquors such as brandy, tequila, whiskey and red wine, which have the highest concentrations of congeners. By contrast, clear liquors, such as vodka and gin, have fewer

congeners.

Mitchell emphasized, however, that the only sure way to prevent a hangover is to abstain from alcohol, or drink responsibly, in moderation.

More information: Abstract

Most Americans will experience a hangover at least once in their lifetime. The term hangover refers to a collection of unpleasant and painful symptoms that can develop after excessive alcohol intake. Headache, body aches, weakness, nausea are all common symptoms of a hangover. Acute alcohol intoxication can affect the liver, the brain, gastrointestinal system and the central nervous system. Alcohol is metabolized in the liver by two enzymes. Alcohol dehydrogenase oxidizes ethanol to form acetaldehyde; a reactive compound that quickly forms toxic free radicals. Acetaldehyde is further metabolized to the non-toxic acetic acid by the enzyme aldehyde dehydrogenase. Acetaldehyde produces many of the symptoms associated with a hangover. However, different types of alcohol can cause different hangover symptoms to manifest. Drinks with higher concentrations of congeners generally result in more pronounced symptoms. Red wines and dark liquors such as bourbon, brandy and whiskey contain higher levels of congeners than white wines and clear liquors such as vodka. Carbonation speeds the absorption of alcohol. Herein a general discussion of the biochemical effects of alcohol consumption and the anatomy of the resulting hangover will be discussed.

Provided by American Chemical Society

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