

Can you avoid hangovers after heavy drinking?

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Are some people immune to hangovers, and can eating or drinking water after heavy drinking prevent a hangover? The answers appear to be 'no' and 'no' according to new research presented the ECNP conference in Amsterdam.

Excessive alcohol consumption has familiar consequences, many of them quite damaging. If a person does not experience a [hangover](#) - and 25% to 30% of drinkers regularly claim this - they may be more likely to continue drinking, so good research into the outcomes of drinking to excess is needed.

A group of international researchers from the Netherlands and Canada have surveyed drinking habits to see what can be understood about 'the morning after'.

789 Canadian students were surveyed about their drinking in the previous month, and questioned about the number of drinks, the timeframe of consumption, and the severity of their hangover. The researchers calculated the estimated Blood Alcohol Concentration in those who experienced hangovers and those who didn't. In fact, four-fifths (79%) of those who claimed not to experience hangovers had an estimated blood alcohol level of less than 0.10% (*see note below).

According to lead author Dr Joris Verster (Utrecht University): "We have been working with Canadian and Dutch students on this issue. In general, we found a pretty straight relationship; the more you drink, the more likely you are to get a hangover. The majority of those who in fact reported never having a hangover tended to drink less, perhaps less than they themselves thought would lead to a hangover".

In a further refinement, the group looked at whether eating or [drinking water](#) directly after drinking alcohol made you less likely to experience a hangover. They questioned 826 Dutch students on their latest [heavy drinking](#) session, and whether they had food or water after the alcohol. 449 students (54.4%) ate after [drinking](#). The [students](#) were asked to rate their hangover (from absent to extreme). In fact, hangover severity was not very different between the two groups.

As Joris Verster said: "Those who took food or [water](#) showed a slight statistical improvement in how they felt over those who didn't, but this didn't really translate into a meaningful difference. From what we know from the surveys so far, the only practical way to avoid a hangover is to drink less alcohol".

He added "These are early questionnaire-based studies, and are amongst the first of their kind. This means they have limitations, but they do give us an indication of what happens. Our next step is to move forward with more controlled trials".

Commenting for the ECNP, Dr Michael Bloomfield (University College, London) said: "Throughout the world the economic and social costs of [alcohol](#) abuse run into hundreds of billions of euros per year. It's therefore very important to answer simple questions like 'how do you avoid a hangover?' Whilst further research is needed, this new research tells us that the answer is simple—'drink less'."

More information: *This is around twice the safe driving limits of 0.05% in many European countries such as the Netherlands, France and Germany. England and Wales, and many states in the USA, have a 0.08% limit. For European figures, see <http://etsc.eu/blood-alcohol-content-bac-drink-driving-limits-across-europe/>.

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