



NATIONAL DRUG AND
ALCOHOL RESEARCH CENTRE

NEW FIGURES ON HANGOVERS SUGGEST SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON YOUNG PEOPLE'S LIVES

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Hangovers are usually regarded as an inevitable part of the Australian Christmas party. Many of us have experienced waking up the morning after to a spinning room, a violent headache and the need to rush to the toilet.

However national survey figures released today suggest that a significant number of young Australians report that these behaviours actually interfered with their work at school, on a job, or at home.

Approximately 6% of young Australian males (52,000) aged between 18-24 reported that there had been a time in the previous 12 months when their life had frequently been affected by hangovers. About half as many young women (23,000) reported similar problems.

These findings from the National Survey of Mental Health and Well-Being demonstrate that some young people believe that their drinking behaviour had directly affected their work or school performance. These results are reinforced by National Household Drug Survey figures which show that over 10% of young men aged 14-19 years experienced a loss of memory after a big night out, with a slightly higher number of women in the same age group reporting a similar effect.

Even though this happens time and time again to some people – it would appear that some Australians continue to overdo it and find themselves the worse for wear the next day.

Paul Dillon from the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre explains why hangovers occur:

“A hangover is the result of your body experiencing a mild reaction resulting from an overdose of alcohol and certain "toxins" that are associated with alcohol consumption,” said Mr Dillon. “Your body attempts to protect itself by producing enzymes to break down and remove the toxins from your body. Unfortunately, the flushing is not rapid enough to prevent the effects of toxin ingestion.”

“This build up of toxins is believed to be a major cause of hangovers. When the toxin level exceeds your body's ability to metabolize them in an efficient manner, you experience the unpleasant and classic symptoms of a hangover. The excess

toxins may irritate your stomach, cause you to vomit, and in general, make you feel ill.”

According to these new findings these symptoms do not only disrupt the drinker’s health but for a significant number of young people it may also affect their home, schooling or employment situation at particular periods of their life.

Another major cause of a hangover is dehydration (the loss of fluids from the body). As you are drinking alcoholic beverages, your body is actually losing fluids. It is not known how much dehydration contributes to causing a hangover, but most experts believe it plays a major role, and all agree that it makes you feel worse.

“The best way to prevent a hangover is not to drink too much but that is not always possible – so be prepared!” said Mr Dillon. “Particularly at this time of year it is better to be prepared rather than suffer the consequences the next day”.

- Before you go out, eat a good meal. A fatty meal is beneficial as fat is digested slowly and will protect the stomach from the irritating effects of alcohol. A glass of milk will protect the stomach too, and slows down the absorption of alcohol.
- As for the ‘hair of the dog’ after the event – the hangover victim is supposed to drink the same drink that they drank the night before, although many just drink a Bloody Mary. When you wake up with a hangover your body is going through mild withdrawals from an alcohol overdose. By drinking more alcohol, you may alleviate some symptoms of the hangover, but the effects are only temporary. At some time or another you are going to face the hangover – might as well get it over with quickly!

The Christmas and New Year party period is traditionally a time when people “overdo” it. It’s no fun having a hangover, yet despite knowing this, tens of thousands of Australians will be suffering and saying the same thing over the holiday break - ‘I’m never going to do that again.’

“In our society it’s unrealistic to believe that people will not drink over the festive season,” said Mr Dillon. “If you do find yourself not feeling too well, remember that the effects of a hangover last about 24 hours - so be patient. You’ll soon feel better and ready, inevitably, to do it all again!”

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