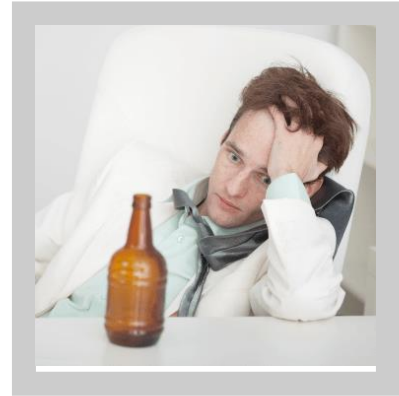


Name _____

Date _____

Veisalgia

Veisalgia, more commonly known as a hangover, is the name for the range of unpleasant physical effects that occur following the excessive consumption of alcoholic beverages. The most commonly experienced effects include nausea, vomiting, sensitivity to light and sound, headache, thirst, and lethargy. The degree of the hangover's severity is determined by factors occurring both before and after the alcohol is metabolized. Currently, there is no scientifically proven way to treat the symptoms of a hangover. Furthermore, if current research trends are any indication, there is no cure for veisalgia on the horizon.



The main pre-metabolic cause of veisalgia is the quantity of alcohol consumed. Binge drinking is one of the most notorious contributors to hangovers. Empirical research suggests that even an increase in consumption from four to six beers can result in twice the susceptibility to end up with a hangover. Another pre-consumption factor that contributes to hangovers is the amount of congeners present in the alcohol. Congeners are chemical substances produced during the fermentation process that give the alcohol color, taste, and aroma. Recent studies have shown that alcohol with a high congener content, such as bourbon (which is brown), is three times as likely to cause a hangover as the same amount of a low-congener alcohol, such as vodka (which is clear).

Post-metabolic causes of veisalgia have less to do with the amount or kind of alcohol consumed and more to do with genetics. One of the major post-metabolic causes of veisalgia is the production of acetaldehyde. During the initial stages of metabolization, the liver produces an enzyme known as alcohol dehydrogenase. This enzyme works to convert the ethanol present in alcohol into the compound acetaldehyde. Studies have shown that individuals who lack this enzyme—and thus also lack the ability to break down ethanol in the liver—have a much higher rate of hangover occurrence, and experience more immediate and more severe hangover symptoms.

Treatments and preventative measures for veisalgia range from home remedies to pharmaceutical solutions. Pliny the Elder, an ancient Roman naturalist, suggested that one eat raw owl eggs to treat the symptoms of a hangover. Modern home remedies range from honey to hot sauce to "the hair of the dog," an expression meaning "more alcohol." None of these cures have any scientific basis, and, instead of making symptoms better, they often actually exacerbate the situation. While popular cures are plentiful, very few clinical trials have been conducted to counteract the symptoms of hangovers. One team of scientists theorized that extract from the globe artichoke (*Cynara scolymus*) would treat the symptoms, while others have administered doses of propranolol, tolifenamic acid, glucose, or various herbal extracts to sufferers. None of these efforts has been met with any degree of definitive success.

Developing a clinical cure for veisalgia is particularly difficult because hangover symptoms can be arbitrary and hard to quantify. Additionally, clinical preventions are also troublesome to generate, because there is a lack of qualitative research on the causes of veisalgia. This lack of research is likely due to the fact that the scientific community does not generally view veisalgia as a serious ailment. Health care professionals are much more likely to spend time and grant money researching solutions to more critical problems, such as alcohol abuse. Hangovers, on the other hand, are generally viewed as somewhat beneficial: nature's disincentive against drunkenness.