Q. What is a hangover?

A. Simply put, a hangover is what happens the morning after you drank too much. Although a hangover can occur any time after consuming too much alcohol, most drinkers drink at night and experience hangover side effects the next morning. Hangover symptoms leave you feeling sick with some combination of headache, dizziness, fuzzy-headedness, sleepiness, low energy, thirst, and cotton mouth. You will likely be averse to light and noise as well. All of this can make you irritable. The more alcohol consumed, the worse the hangover symptoms and the longer they last. Typical symptoms can last an hour or two up to an entire day as the alcohol slo-o-o-o-o-wly seeps out of your body.

Most of the hangover symptoms are a result of dehydration that occurs as a result of alcohol’s diuretic effect in the body. A diuretic (soda, coffee, alcohol) directs the body’s water to the bladder for release, thus the reason drinkers need to make frequent trips to the restroom. The result is that you will feel dehydrated the next morning. Fatigue and alcohol withdrawal make it feel worse.

How to deal with a hangover? There’s not a magic pill even though the drugstore shelves promise there is one. Hangovers eventually end with rest, drinking plenty of water, and waiting it out. You may have heard the “hair of the dog” remedy which is to drink more alcohol, but it’s never a good idea. For a headache, take pain relievers with aspirin, ibuprofen (Advil), or naproxen sodium (Alleve). Do NOT take acetaminophen (Tylenol) after drinking, as it can cause serious liver damage.

Prevention is the best solution for (avoiding) hangovers. If you stay in the “Sweet Spot” where you’re having fun, alert, and in charge of the alcohol (instead of the alcohol controlling you), you’re less likely to have a hangover. Better yet, you’re more likely to have a good time and remember it, too.