

- Drinking of alcoholic beverages / Anxiety

## Your hangxiety

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Spencer recommends asking yourself why you're drinking quite so much. "If alcohol is making you feel depressed or anxious, it raises the question, why do it? Ultimately, if it is making you unhappy, there's a good argument to stop."

**THAT UNQUENCHABLE THIRST** We've all woken up after a night of indulgence with a rusty voice and a throat more parched than burnt toast. The main contributor to a hangover is ethanol – the alcohol in your drink. Ethanol is a diuretic, affecting the hormones found at the base of the brain, and increases your need to go to the loo. Anna Daniels, a nutritionist and dietitian adds: "Alcohol when taken in excess causes dehydration of all tissues in your body – including your brain, which is why hangovers often come with a headache. The dehydrated brain has, in fact, shrunk. Because of this diuretic nature of alcohol, not only does the body start to work harder and faster to expel urine, the kidneys are less able to filter the blood sufficiently. Dehydration has other knock-on effects, like dry skin, but it can also impact mood. In more extreme and prolonged cases of dehydration, there are increases in the risk of cancer and high blood pressure."

The obvious answer is to drink more water to replace lost fluids or alternate an alcoholic drink with a glass of water or a sugar-free soda. Some studies have shown that L-theanine, an amino acid found in green tea, supports an imbalance of glutamate experienced during a hangover.

**ARE YOU IN DEFICIT?** Alcohol depletes us. Daniels says: "Even moderate drinking can affect our thiamine (vitamin B1) status. Alcohol causes deficiency due to malabsorption of thiamine in the gut and impaired use of thiamine in the cells. In chronic cases of liver disease, folate acid deficiency is seen due to the reduced ability of the liver to store folate along with increased urinary excretion."

Studies also link a lack of folate with depression and anxiety. And while a supplement can help to increase levels and encourage the synthesis of "happy" hormones dopamine and serotonin, statistics show that men are less likely to pop the pills than women.

**HANGOVERS ARE PERSONAL** Dr Tzortziou Brown says: “The effects will be dependent on the individual. There are lots of factors including age, body composition and overall physical health which will determine the severity of the morning-after symptoms.” Most experts agree we should all drink less as we get older. Our vital organs will no longer be working as efficiently, and the liver – our filtering system for harmful substances – is likely to have more fatty deposits and decreased volume.

Women have particular challenges. Alcohol can affect the metabolism of oestrogen and has been linked to an increased risk of breast cancer, especially post menopause. Dr Louise Newson, menopause specialist and founder of the menopause app Balance, agrees: “Not only can alcohol trigger night sweats and disrupted sleep, it can impact your general mental wellbeing. In perimenopause and menopause, when fluctuating and falling hormone levels can affect your mood, it’s more important than ever to prioritise your mental health.”

Drinkaware.co.uk has an online self-assessment that can help identify whether your drinking is harmful to your health. Drinkaware also has a free app, which can help you track your drinking.

#### 1. THE BENEFITS OF FASTING

I don’t eat breakfast, because I fast for 16 hours a day (eight of those are while I’m asleep – easy).

When there’s no food coming in, your blood sugar and insulin levels run stable, so instead of storing fat, you burn it. Plus, when fat breaks down it produces ketones, which your brain really likes to run on. So I do all my best thinking in the morning. I just feel sharper.

#### 2. DRINK COFFEE

I couldn’t do it without a very strong cup of black coffee each morning. It could be argued that caffeine has a small impact on blood glucose and insulin signalling. But as I always say to my patients: don’t let the perfect be the enemy of the good.

#### 3. GET ON YOUR BIKE

I cycle to work. Since I haven’t yet had breakfast, the sugar in my blood is being burned as I pedal. My body has to pull more energy out of storage, which is beneficial for weight control. Then on the cycle ride home, instead of the sugar from my lunch ending up in storage, it’ll be used to pedal.

#### 4. STAND UP

It’s better to take every opportunity to move than to do a single exercise session and sit for the rest of the day. I’ve just seen a patient in A&E and afterwards I made sure to stand while writing up my notes. I’m lucky my job is pretty active and I clock up a lot of steps, particularly while doing inpatient work. But I tell my patients not to obsess over the 10,000 step goal: see how many steps you took today, then try to build on that gently.

#### 5. PACK YOUR LUNCH

I ask my patients to make packed lunches, so that they're not forced to choose between expensive and less healthy options when they're out. I do the same, and batch-cook meals so there's always something to hand. Today it was home-made meatballs in a ragu sauce with feta cheese, then Greek yoghurt and berries.

I never consider calories when I'm putting meals together. Instead, I think about what tastes good and what will keep me feeling full (there's lots of protein in my meatballs and feta). I want to eat healthy natural fats and have enough fibre to feed my gut bacteria, so my meatballs have carrots, cauliflower rice and mushrooms packed in. It's a low sugar meal too, so I won't get a blood glucose surge, then a crash, which would be a disaster at work.

If I'm working, it's tempting to wolf food down. But I try to eat slowly – I'll eat half and save half for later if pressed. Otherwise the fullness hormones in your gut don't kick in fast enough, and it's likely you'll over-eat.

#### 6. PRACTISE SELF-CARE

So many of my patients say: "I'll be happy, when I lose weight". But it's the other way round. When you believe you're worth looking after, the weight loss will naturally follow. Often, we go through a patient's to-do list, and even taking care of the dog can rank higher than their own self-care. We can all do better by the people (and dogs) we care for, if we look after ourselves, too. I like to treat myself to a blow-dry, it sounds frivolous, but it's one hour just for me. The rest of my self-care is in the daily details: making a packed lunch, granting myself some headspace on the cycle home.

#### 7. EAT REAL FOOD

Four small people are waiting to talk to me as soon as my key turns in the lock back home. One of the greatest gifts you can give children is an understanding and enjoyment of food. So the kids help cook dinner: baked salmon with lots of veg, a roast chicken we can bung in the oven.

I don't want to be prescriptive: banned foods take on a glamour they don't deserve. It is more that ultra-processed foods aren't in the store-cupboard at home, because they tend to be low in fibre, with mediocre protein content and lots of sugar. We also rarely eat puddings besides things like natural yoghurt and fruit. The only questions I ask are: are the kids getting enough veg and fibre, does it taste good and are they going to go to bed feeling full and happy? If you are eating proper food, the rest takes care of itself.

#### 8. SCREENS MAKE YOU FEEL HUNGRY

Screens are a big sleep disruptor, so I don't take any screens up to bed. Levels of ghrelin – a hormone that sends hunger signals from your stomach to your brain – run higher after sleep deprivation, so you'll feel really hungry. Your cortisol levels will run high too. Cortisol is a steroid hormone, and weight gain is a common side effect, so you don't want to drive up levels by being sleep deprived.

As told to Hattie Garlick

'The Full Diet', by Dr Saira Hameed, Michael Joseph, £14.99, is out now seeing someone from the waist down in a photobooth – always oddly disturbing.

**PLUMB LINE BREASTS** So called because the cleavage is several inches long. The modern trend is for big personalities to advertise their plumb line and you score points for having a lot of breast and decorative bra on show. The more frontage the better.

**SMALL MAN BREASTS** Men assume that women love cushiony Chippendale pecs but the truth is they make us think of Buzz Lightyear (hilarious) and dolphins (slippery and shiny); we'd rather a small man breast. The small man breast is to us what the rather inoffensive woman breast is.

**OLD ROCKER BREASTS** As in Iggy Pop. A slightly saggy grizzled chest on an old-school, tops-off rocker is a badge of honour and more appealing to us than a hard worked on vanity chest. Unless you're talking about Brad Pitt's of course.