

HEALTH

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TCM: hangovers

The traditional Chinese way to health is seen as a way of life: doing everything in moderation, whether it's sleeping, eating, exercising or drinking alcohol. If everything is balanced, the body is in harmony and functions well.

Excess alcohol leads a person to suffer from *veisalgia*, the medical name for a hangover. Symptoms include headache, nausea, sensitivity to light and noise, lethargy, dysphoria and thirst, which usually go away in 24 hours. Sleeping is the only sure cure, but some of these steps may help you feel better in the meantime.

Drinking water washes the alcohol out of the body. Eating bland food such as toast or crackers can boost blood sugar and settle the stomach. Keep the room quiet and dark.

In TCM, alcohol leads to dampness and heat accumulation in the body. Dampness can be expelled through

sweating and urination, and the heat is cleared by methods that cool the body. Fresh juice of radishes, orange, watermelon, pear, celery, sugar cane or lotus root are useful for this purpose. To promote recovery and strengthen the weakened digestive system, harmonise the spleen and stomach functions with warm diluted rice porridge.

Ginseng licorice tea is a healthy substitute to "traditional" hangover cures. Take a handful of small rootlets of ginseng, 10 slices of licorice root, add six cups of boiling water in a teapot and steep for 20 minutes before decanting the liquid into another container and drink throughout the day. Other ingredients such as mung beans, honeysuckle flower and tangerine peel are also suitable.

Some herbs such as kudzu root, kudzu flower, cardamon seed and baical skullcap root help to detoxify the liver

and clear out the whole body. Kudzu Flower Hangover Decoction is suitable for regular drinkers who tend to have bad breath, throat dryness, poor appetite, fatigue and thick tongue coating. The formula is not suitable for regular use as its harsh properties may weaken the body.

Liver damage is a concern for heavy drinkers. Rhemannia root, astragalus root, reishi mushroom and bupleurum root promote the regeneration of the liver cells; wormwood herb, white peony root, dandelion and forsythia capsule can lower the liver enzymes.

The best remedy, of course, is to drink in moderation.

Rose Tse and Jenny Eagleton are with Integrated Chinese Medicine Holdings (icm.com.hk). Before taking any medicine, consult your TCM or medical practitioner