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## Why Alcohol Messes with Your Poop — and How to Prevent It

By Gabrielle Kassel | January 30, 2019

This is why alcohol has an effect on your number two

For anyone who's gone out for a drink and had a few too many, you probably know firsthand the not-so-happy side effects of alcohol.

In addition to the headaches, nausea, dizziness, and sensitivity to light and sound that often accompany a hangover, there are the bowel movements.

And let's not sugarcoat it, these are not your average poops.

This gut-wrenching reaction that can result in runny or even explosive bowel movements is common enough that next morning poops have earned the equal parts endearing and foul nickname: the day after drinking sh\*\*s (or DADS, for short).

But why exactly does booze make you poop — and poop weird?

We spoke to two docs to find out.

Why does alcohol mess with your stool?

The good news is that it's not just in your imagination, says functional medicine practitioner, **Dr. Elroy Vojdani**, IFMPC.

"Alcohol and its by-products are toxins [and] are the perfect storm for GI distress," says Vojdani.

He goes on to explain that alcohol can irritate the lining of your intestines, which is called the epithelial layer. When this lining gets irritated it loses some of its absorptive properties.

And what the body can't properly absorb, it expels.

Another reason for this need to go is that alcohol suppresses the secretion of vasopressin, an antidiuretic hormone that regulates the body's water retention, explains Dr. Neha Nigam.

"The inhibition of this hormone prevents reabsorption of water from the kidneys, which causes increased urination," says Nigam, who is a gastroenterologist at Northwestern Medicine's Digestive Health Center.

That's why you pee so much when you're drunk. But it's also why there's extra water in your waste.

### THE OPPOSITE EFFECT

Because alcohol increases urination it can cause dehydration, which is one of the main causes of constipation, explains Nigam. That's why that some people experience the exact opposite of soft stools.

So why does the release happen with such urgency?

"Alcohol — specifically the ethanol in alcohol — increases gut motility," explains Nigam. This means whatever is in your colon will start moving faster.

"The colon then has less time to absorb everything, which prevents adequate water absorption."

The result? You guessed it: softer, if not watery, stools... and a desperate need to go.



This “gotta go right now” effect is often even more severe for people with irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), inflammatory bowel disease, celiac disease, and other GI-related conditions, adds Nigam.

What does this mean for frequent imbibers?

If you drink frequently, you can permanently damage your digestive tract which can lead to frequent bouts of diarrhea.

In fact, one 2002 study found that chronic alcohol consumption can make the mucosa more permeable — which can potentially lead to a condition called leaky gut syndrome and decrease the stomach’s ability to destroy bad bacteria, explains Vojdani.

“If you [have] IBS or an autoimmune disorder, this is a very good reason to stay away from alcohol consumption altogether, regardless of whether drinking causes you post-drinking diarrhea or not,” he adds.

How to stop DADS

While Nigam says a guaranteed solution is not to drink at all, drinking in moderation is also an option. This is defined as one standard drink per day for women and two for men — which is 12 ounces of beer, 8 ounces of malt liquor, 5 ounces of wine, and 1.5 ounces of hard liquor.

Ways to help soften the effects of DADS

- Drink in moderation.
- Avoid drinks high in sugar.
- Avoid using a mixer with artificial sugar.
- Avoiding mixing drinks with caffeine, which is also a diuretic.
- Don’t drink on an empty stomach.
- Hydrate with plain water.

While how much you drink is usually more of a contributing factor in your bowel movements, Vojdani recommends also paying attention to what types of alcohol irritate your stomach.

For instance, someone with a gluten intolerance may be irritated by beer, while someone else might have a sensitivity to the tannins in wine.

What you eat and drink ahead of time matters

There’s another factor that could be affecting your number two: what you eat and drink before a night of boozing.

“You should counteract the dehydrating effects of alcohol by staying hydrated before, during, and after drinking,” says Vojdani.

Before you drink, both experts also recommend eating.

“Having food in your stomach can reduce the irritation in your intestines, especially if you eat a balanced meal with fiber-filled food,” says Vojdani



#### What to eat and drink before a night out

- plain crackers and toast
- banana
- white rice
- whole grains
- chicken
- broth
- water

If you don't have time for a full meal, Vojdani says that taking a soluble fiber supplement or two tablespoons of chia seeds the afternoon before a night out drinking can help to enhance your hydration. It's possible that what you eat during your night out is also to thank for your prolific pooping. While food usually acts a protective mechanism by slowing the emptying process, some foods actually speed up digestion and irritate the GI tract.

#### Foods to avoid while you're drinking

- spicy foods and condiments
- highly seasoned foods like curries
- dairy products like cheese, ice cream, and milk
- greasy or fried foods such as chips, fries, or chicken tenders
- caffeinated beverages like coffee, matcha, or energy drinks

#### When to seek treatment

Usually, the post-drinking poops will clear up (er, out) within 24 to 48 hours. If they last longer than that, you may want to talk with your healthcare provider who may recommend the use of use of antidiarrheal medications such as Imodium A-D or Pepto-Bismol.

If you start to experience symptoms like extreme weakness, fatigue, lightheadedness, or dizziness, you could be severely dehydrated and need to seek medical attention.

Otherwise, DADS should pass soon enough. And if a morning of sludge is really bothersome, you can always try drinking these alcohol-free cocktails instead.

If you or someone you love is concerned about alcohol misuse, it's important to seek help. You can find more information on support groups here.

<https://www.healthline.com/health/alcohol-poop#8>