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Hangover

Epidemiology of a New Orleans staple

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My goal was to investigate the epidemiology of New Orleans hangovers. Data-driven epidemiologists seek out group diagnoses, outbreaks, transmission modes, etiologies, time patterns and preventive measures. My first call was to a liquor and wine store.

"People come here to buy liquor. They don't share their hangover tales with us," says Ben Lazich, owner of The Wine Seller at 5000 Prytania St. "As far as sales go, August is the deadest month of all; too hot and everyone out of town. Sales really start picking up in October, and November brings Thanksgiving. December, with gift baskets, is our busiest month."

My investigation then shifted from purveyors to what restaurateurs call the back of house. Kitchen staff are rarely non-drinking Baptists. The only exception that comes to mind was "the Rev" at the old Ruth's Chris on Broad Street and Orleans Avenue. The Rev broiled steaks by night and attended the Baptist Seminary by day.

Caesar, Jonathan and Nick (real first names only by request) are a formidable gastronomic triumvirate representing Coquette, Patois and Primitivo. These are big guys cooking some of the best food in New Orleans. I think it's fair to say that they, like many kitchen staff, enjoy a drink or two or more after long, hot nights in restaurant kitchens.

"The now three good friends were just getting to know each other when the power of a hangover cemented their friendship forever in 2014," reports hangover detective Joel Hitchcock Tilton, an urban gardener and concert promoter at Paradigm Gardeners.

"These three were at a New Year's Eve party heavy on overly tattooed 'industry' folk where liquor flowed. Caesar peeled off with a pre-arranged first date leaving Jonathan and Nick as mutual wingmen to prowl for 'top talent.'

"Nick quickly zeroed in on a beautiful brunette. Jonathan met an equally ravishing lady and the chemistry sparked. After a few worn one-liners and numerous drinks, both newly minted couples left to ring in the New Year and follow their biological impulses in the guys' separate apartments figuring Caesar had left with his date as well.

"Actually, Caesar with his new date had decamped in a back booth. After knocking back a few too many his eyes shut, his head tilted back and he was out. His date began to smack him, Jesus style, on both cheeks. But nothing, he wouldn't come to. She

enlisted the aid of a massive security guard to carry Caesar to her car and drove straight to a nearby hospital. A nurse suggested that the date needed to go home and assured her that Caesar was in good hands.

“Meanwhile, Nick and his new friend checked out his bedroom. ‘Wow, is that an axe?’ she inquired. ‘Yeah, I’ve never been a gun type of guy so it’s mainly for self-defense. You know what they say about guys with big axes,’ Nick joked. Soft giggles turned to loud moans to a raucous roller-coaster ride of sorts. Off the bed they rolled and then thud. Nick totally passed out and awoke the next day in an empty bed. He saw a near empty bottle of tequila on his nightstand next to a needle and thread and a handwritten note that read ‘You’re a wild man. I enjoyed last night. Take care of yourself and call me when you heal.’

“‘Heal?’ Nick thought to himself as he stepped out of the bed. ‘Well that’s odd. ... Ahhhhh’ he screamed, his foot opening up like the fractured London Canal. Nick’s foot was spewing blood, like a crimson BP oil spill with seemingly no end in sight. Crawling, he headed to the bathroom, leaving a trail of blood as he began to feel faint. He tied a towel around his foot, slinked to his car just outside and speed off to the hospital, leaving his car on the ER ramp.

“‘Wow, you really did yourself a number. But good work with those sutures on the bottom of your foot,’ said the ER physician a few minutes later.

“‘Sutures?’ Nick thought. He hadn’t seen the bottom of his foot or the sutures. Now he remembered rolling out of bed the night before. He had slammed into the dresser, knocked his battle-axe to the floor, and gouged his foot. His inebriated, lustful state had erased all other aftermath memories of the injury. His New Year’s Eve date must’ve had some medical training. The large laceration had been sutured with sewing thread from his travel kit.

“As Nick and Caesar slept off their discretions on hospital gurneys clothed in hospital gowns several rooms apart, Jonathan woke up with a thundering headache and distant memories of an evening with a fantabulous woman. Rubbing his eyes crusted with yellow boogies, he saw a note: ‘Hey big guy. Wonderful night but I had to go to work early. Come by the ER at (hospital name undisclosed) and we can get coffee.’”

“Jonathan threw on his clothes and sped to the ER. His date from the night before, now in a nursing uniform, ushered him in just as Caesar was rolling back from radiology. As he and Caesar loudly recounted their evening, they heard a muffled cry from another ER cubicle. It was Nick. The three musketeers, two in hospital gowns and one in street clothes, were now reunited in a post-inebriated state of throbbing headaches and assorted injuries.”

Brobson Lutz M.D. with investigative assistance by Joel Hitchcock Tilton

Epidemiology of the New Orleans hangover

In a drinking city like New Orleans, the hangover is a staple embedded in our DNA, just like red beans and rice.

The chemistry and physiology of the hangover are still poorly understood. Somehow excess alcohol triggers increased levels of toxic chemicals and cellular messages called cytokines leading to dizziness, throbbing headaches, rapid heart rates, nausea, vomiting, a relative dehydration and increased sensitivity to light and sound.

The incidence likely peaks in the late teen years and early 20s. Younger visitors to our city are probably at higher risk than locals. And hangover incidence falls with increasing age, with wisdom emerging as the most effective immunization against recurrent attacks.

Favorite hangover cures abound, but the New Orleans go-to hangover aide in my opinion remains Ya-Ka-Mein, aka Old Sober.

Three Hangover Recipes From Three Chefs

Caesar’s Hangover Remedy

1 packet instant Ramen

1 quart water

2 whole eggs

Scallions

Siracha

2 extra-strength Aleve

1 bottle Pedialyte

Bring water to a boil. Add Ramen with seasoning packet and flavored oil packet. Turn down to a simmer and cook for 3 minutes. While noodles are cooking, crack eggs and scramble in a separate bowl. Remove Ramen from heat and stir in eggs until cooked, about 2 minutes. Pour into a bowl, add minced scallions and Siracha. Take the two Aleve with the Pedialyte. Proceed to sit on your most comfy couch and crush your hangover.

Nick's Hangover Remedy:

Take two shots of whiskey.

Jonathan's Hangover Remedy:

1 Tablespoon veg oil

6 ounces ground beef

One slice American cheese

1 Tablespoon mayo

Two slices of bunny bread

One leaf of Ice burg lettuce

One slice onion

Salt

Pepper

1 cheap beer

4 Advil

Season beef patty well with salt and pepper. Sear on high heat in oil till desired doneness. Toast the bread if that's your thing. Add cheese on the burger patty while it's still hot, and then build the burger with the rest of the ingredients. Eat it in four bites and slam the whole beer. Then take the Advil.