

Thrill From The Grill

A Pancake Temple's Hangover Cure

BY BROBSON LUTZ M.D. | GREG MILES PHOTO



"Eat plenty of pancakes. It absorbs the toxins. That's why we sell so many pancakes on Sundays," said Mary 'Ladybug' Murdock, ageless, the senior force behind Betsy's Pancake House. "Pancakes not your thing? We have homemade biscuits with milk gravy."

"Probably ninety percent of our customers are regulars. Our daily regulars don't order. We tell the kitchen when they walk in the door. Like Judge John Shea likes his bacon slightly undercooked. We call it the Judge's bacon," said Ladybug.

Regulars at any establishment are generally persons with opinions to share. Betsy's is a temple of wisdom endowed with the common-sense ways of early morning risers. The regulars populate their tables daily like clockwork beginning shortly after Betsy's 5:30 AM weekday openings. So what about hangover cures?

"Don't drink cheap liquor. But if you do, take two Alka-Seltzers," said Leland Roussell, 81, a retired textile processor. His table is in the corner by the Drew Brees poster. His

daily special includes two eggs over well with a busted yolk, cooked but not brown. His booming voice of welcome to other regulars led Ladybug to dub him the Mayor of Betsy's.

Steven Oddo, 53, hasn't had a hangover since getting into his father's Southern Comfort stash at the tender age of 14. His father rescued him from the throws of that hangover with V-8 juice.

"Wash down some Advil with plenty of water and go for a greasy hamburger. Even better is a 'morning after hamburger' topped with ham and an egg. and, if you don't have to go to work, a Bloody Mary works wonders," said Lisa Longordo, a popular waitress at Betsy's who works the floor with the grace and speed of a ballet dancer.

"I think too much alcohol metabolism lowers the blood sugar. Drink a coke and you feel better," said Detective Winston Harbin, 53, the dancing policeman.

Instead of spending hours at some gym, the affable Harbin sheds excess Betsy's calories doing Wobble dance routines.

"I had a few hangovers in my day and would take Alka-Seltzer. But I stopped drinking. Too much trouble," said James Daniels, 66.

"Ya-ka-mein before you imbibe. It coats the stomach," said Rochelle Anderson, 51, another Betsy's breakfast regular before reporting to her nearby day job.

She owns Ro's Smokin Jo's, a neighborhood restaurant and bar near Dillard University.

No roundup of local hangover remedies would be complete without Ya-ka-mein. Core ingredients in this meat or seafood based broth are spaghetti, soy sauce, and hot sauce with halved hard boiled eggs and chopped green onions swimming on top.

Before Hurricane Katrina, ya-ka-mein meant a trip to a corner grocery store or food shack in black and transitional neighborhoods. Linda Green, the ya-ka-mein lady and promoter, serves a couple of versions in large Styrofoam cups at most local street festivals. It even migrated to a few white tablecloth restaurants around town.

The phrase "coat your stomach" often populates hangover discussions. Dr. Ben Guider, an uptown gastroenterologist, downplays the notion: "Alcohol is rapidly absorbed from the gastric mucosa and proximal small bowel. Food may slightly delay alcohol absorption, but food doesn't prevent it. Hangovers seem to decrease or go away with age. My last was 40 years ago. Binge drinking by younger folks causes most of that commode hugging stuff."

Dr. Guider's remarks on the fading frequency of hangovers as one ages hit a chord. Maybe I was looking for hangover cures in all the wrong places. The regulars at Betsy's spoke as historians describing long ago hangovers, and then in walks a handsome, muscular young man who takes a seat at the counter.

"Actually, I am getting over a hangover right now. Last night I drank a handful of beers and some margaritas at Juan's Flying Burrito. Then I had some nightcaps at the Holy Ground," said Ryan Shaner, 30, a construction manager at the high-end Bywater Woodworks and a post-Katrina transplant from Michigan. "I go to the gym to lift weights and sweat out the hangover. Then I come to Betsy's for pancakes and bacon. If I get up too late for breakfast, there is always Parasol's for a firecracker po-boy, another go to for hangovers."

"He's a good boy. We see him a couple of times a month," said Ladybug as Shaner took off for work and was answering questions about her nickname. "My father nicknamed me. He called me his little Ladybug when I was six weeks old and the name stuck. All our family had nicknames. My sister was Monkey and my brother was Peanut. We had a cousin called Pea Liquor, and my daddy was always Punk."

HAIR OF THE DOG & BEYOND

Betsy's Pancake House

2542 Canal St, New Orleans. Open for breakfast and lunch daily except for Saturdays. If pancakes and bacon from Betsy's doesn't help your hangover, you may need to crawl for help to the nearby cavernous University Medical Center.

Ro's Smokin Jo's

3827 Frenchman Street, New Orleans. Soul food lunch and dinner specials with music at night. Ya-ka-mein is a seasonal menu favorite.

Ya-ka-mein

Also called Old Sober, has become a menu staple on several upscale restaurants around town including Meauxbar, 942 North Rampart Street.

For weight loss routines

Detective Winston Harbin shows "Cupid Shuffle" Wobble dance moves as a Zulu parade approaches. [Youtube.com/watch?v=WI2JUqvHUaU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WI2JUqvHUaU)

TIPS

Think before you drink*

1. Eat first

Alcohol is absorbed more quickly if your stomach is empty. It may help to eat something before drinking alcohol.

2. Take it slow

Pace yourself. Limit yourself to just one drink or less each hour.

3. Choose carefully

Beverages with fewer congeners — such as light-colored beers and wine — are slightly less likely to cause hangovers than are beverages with more congeners — such as brandy, whiskey, dark beers and red wine.

4. Sip water between drinks

Drinking a full glass of water after each alcoholic drink will help you stay hydrated. It will also help you drink less alcohol.

*Source: MayoClinic.org
