

Heavy night? Cocktail of plants will ease your hangover

Tom Whipple Science Editor

Pliny the Elder recommended treating a hangover with raw owl eggs. Hippocrates suggested starting drinking again.

Two millennia and many folk remedies later, the successors of those two thinkers have at last found a treatment that really can ease the morning after.

In fact the ingredients for a scientifically-validated hangover cure, reported in *The BMJ*, can at a push be whipped up at home, consisting of extracts from Barbados cherry, prickly pear, ginkgo biloba, willow and ginger root.

The trial by German researchers has shown that a cocktail of these plant extracts significantly reduced the subsequent side-effects of drinking — possibly by helping the body metabolise alcohol.

The research found no evidence for the common idea that hangover

intensity is related to dehydration.

Patrick Schmitt, from the Institute of Molecular Physiology at Johannes Gutenberg-University in Mainz, said that despite their ubiquity it is not easy to study hangovers.

“It is always a difficult topic, and there are only a few studies. It is almost political. People say you shouldn’t research hangovers because the answer is people shouldn’t drink alcohol,” he said. “They say if we find a mixture to improve the hangover, people will then drink even more.”

This opposition to research meant, he found, that there was little in the way of good evidence to draw on

Hugh Laurie as Wooster with a Jeeves’ special



Pick your poison

To ease Bertie Wooster’s pounding head and churning stomach, Jeeves has an equally nauseating mix up his sleeve: raw egg, Worcestershire sauce and red pepper. Other literary remedies tend to revolve around more alcohol. Ernest Hemingway offered a mix of absinthe and iced champagne, while Kingsley Amis recommended, among other things, a mix of beef paste and vodka. Folk cures include saunas, tripe and pickle juice. However, in 2009 Newcastle University researchers found that the best cure was a bacon butty.

when seeking a treatment. However, by looking through past literature he and his colleague at the same institution, Professor Bernhard Lieb, found likely candidates for natural compounds that could help a hangover.

If funding and previous research were hard to find, Dr Schmitt found the same was not true for test subjects. He had no problem inviting more than 200 Germans for a night at the university, where he provided unlimited drink.

Some test subjects, aged between 18 and 65, started and ended the night with a sachet of the plant extract, some with a placebo.

Then between 5pm and 9pm, he and his colleague carefully recorded how much beer and wine they took. In general, he said, “they had a nice night”.

The same was not true the morning after though, when they were all ordered to arrive back at 9am prompt to be questioned on their hangovers. That

was when those who had taken the supplement reported 34 per cent less intense headaches and 42 per cent less nausea.

To some of the subjects’ surprise there was no link between hangover and how hydrated they were.

Dr Schmitt said the next step would be to identify the specific compounds involved, and maybe combine them in a “hangover pill”.

None of the ingredients are licensed drugs. In fact, many are available over the counter at health food shops, suggesting a homemade version could work just as well.

Another option, that he admitted might need some further thought, would be to cut out the need for a supplement entirely. “Maybe we could make them a common additive in alcoholic drinks,” he said.

Then at last, as Hippocrates suggested, drink really might be its own cure.

De Beauvoir novel written off by Sartre finally to be published

Adam Sage Paris

They were France’s most celebrated postwar intellectual couple but like many less illustrious relationships, the one involving Simone de Beauvoir, the groundbreaking feminist, and Jean-Paul Sartre, the revered philosopher, was marked by petty sentiments as well as lofty thought.

When de Beauvoir wrote a novel in 1954 based on the story of her close friendship with a schoolgirl classmate who had died aged 21, Sartre dismissed it as uninteresting. She never tried to publish the work, and it ended up in her archives.

Now, more than three decades after her death, readers will have a chance to decide whether Sartre was right. The novel, *Les Inséparables*, is to be made public after Sylvie Le Bon de Beauvoir, the author’s adopted daughter, agreed to its publication.

Laurence Tăcu, director of Éditions de l’Herne, the French publishing house that is to bring out the novel this autumn, is in no doubt that Sartre was mistaken. She said that the work illustrated the depth of de Beauvoir’s talent and suggested that the philosopher’s judgment may not have been entirely objective.

“I think he might have been a little jealous,” she said. “He was often very critical of [de Beauvoir’s] work, wrongly in my opinion.”

Les Inséparables was written five years after de Beauvoir published her seminal feminist essay, *The Second Sex*, which was placed on a list of banned books by the Vatican amid outrage over her argument that women’s liberation required access to contraception and to the workplace and the overthrow of stereotypes involving maternity and femininity.

Ms Tăcu said that de Beauvoir chose not to publish *Les Inséparables* in part because she considered the account too



personal, and because she was influenced by Sartre’s criticism. “She was always affected by what Sartre said,” Ms Tăcu said.

Ms Le Bon de Beauvoir disagreed, saying that her adopted mother was simply going through a period in which she favoured the publication of factual works over fictional writings. As a result, she left *Les Inséparables* in her archives, which were inherited by Ms Le Bon de Beauvoir on de Beauvoir’s death in 1980.

“She might have got round to publishing the story one day,” Ms Le Bon de Beauvoir said. “It is an accomplished and finished work.”

She added that the novel offered an insight into the male-dominated Catholic conservative order that marked de Beauvoir’s childhood, and helped to explain her subsequent feminism.

The work is a fictional account based



The novelist Simone de Beauvoir, above right with her childhood friend Zaza, the inspiration for *Les Inséparables*

Rebel of the Left Bank

Simone de Beauvoir was born into the Parisian Catholic bourgeoisie in 1908 but rebelled during her adolescence to declare herself an atheist (Adam Sage writes).

She met Jean-Paul Sartre at the Sorbonne University in Paris, where they began a

tumultuous lifelong affair. Both had other lovers, with de Beauvoir having affairs with women as well as men. They went on to become the central figures in the Left Bank set that dominated French intellectual life for decades.

Her works include

The Mandarins, a novel based on her liaison with an American writer, and *The Second Sex*, a feminist essay featuring such celebrated quotes as “One is not born a woman: one becomes one,” and “Few tasks are more like the torture of Sisyphus than housework.”

on the de Beauvoir’s close friendship with Zaza, a girl at her Parisian school whom she met at the age of nine. Zaza fell in love twice, first with her cousin, then with a fellow student at university. Both romances were quashed by a

society unable to accept that women should be free to choose their own lives.

Zaza, renamed Andrée in the novel, was sent to the UK by her parents, who hoped that she would escape temptation there. She died of viral encephalitis

a month before her 22nd birthday. “She was crushed by society. It was a tragedy,” said Ms Le Bon de Beauvoir, who describes Zaza’s death as an assassination. “She died of an illness but the illness was the result of all the contradictions and all the ties she had to face.”

De Beauvoir was haunted by Zaza’s life and death for years, and mentioned her friend in several of her works, including *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*, her autobiographical account of rebellion against conservative social values.

Ms Le Bon de Beauvoir, a philosophy professor who met de Beauvoir as a student and who was adopted by the feminist writer more than two decades later, has published writings that had never previously been made public, including diaries. She has embarked on the publication of literary works left in de Beauvoir’s archives and plans to publish novels she wrote during her youth.

ASSOCIATION ELISABETH LACON.