Live Healthy

BETTER SAFE THAN SORRY
Lay off cocktails until you've been pain-med-free for at least 24 hours.

Can "mixology" hurt your health?

You know not to take medication with booze on a regular basis—but popping a few headache pills after happy hour can't hurt, right? Actually, it might.

Combining acetaminophen and alcohol, even in light to moderate doses, can more than double a person's risk of kidney problems, according to research presented at the American Public Health Association's 2013 annual meeting. People who regularly had one to two drinks and took 1,200 milligrams of acetaminophen a day (that's less than three Extra Strength Tylenol tablets or 3 tablespoons of NyQuil Cold and Flu) were 123 percent more likely to experience renal dysfunction than people who reported frequently consuming one or the other, but not both. Overall, a person's risk is very low: Only 1.2 percent of respondents reported kidney problems at all, ranging from urinary incontinence to requiring dialysis. But lead author Harrison Ndetan, associate professor for research and biostatistics at Parker University in Dallas, still cautions against drinking alcohol if you've been taking acetaminophen regularly—or vice versa. "Doing it once or twice may not create serious problems, but it is a risky behavior," he says. "You're essentially giving your kidneys a stress test, and who knows how they'll respond."