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Your Body, Dissected
by T. E. Holt, M.D.

Why does my skin get red and blotchy when I drink alcohol?

Blame your gut's reaction to a good time. Moments after booze hits your belly, your stomach releases an enzyme called alcohol dehydrogenase (ADH) that tries to convert the alcohol into something less toxic to your nervous system. The byproducts of that process are energy and ethylaldehyde. While ethylaldehyde is less toxic than alcohol, it's still not entirely benign. It stimulates the release of adrenaline, quickening your pulse; that's why overindulging can lead to "holiday heart syndrome," a temporary but potentially dangerous irregular heartbeat. Ethylaldehyde also has the cosmetic consequence of dilating capillaries in your face—hence the rosy coloration of your cheeks. Why doesn't it show in everyone? Some people tend to secrete more ADH than others, which produces more ethylaldehyde and, as a result, a more noticeable "I've had a few" flushed face.

Will I really help the earth by joining the Meatless Monday movement?

We don't want to stand between a man and his strip steak, but chew on these arguments for abstaining. Let's start with the water savings: It takes 1,845 gallons of H2O to produce a pound of beef but just 39 gallons to yield the same amount of vegetables, according to the UNESCO-IHE Institute for Water Education. Then there's the crap factor: Farm-animal waste is funneled into football-field-size lagoons that release toxic gases such as nitrous oxide and methane, says Pamela Koch, E.D.D., R.D., executive director for the Center for Food, Education & Policy at Teachers College, Columbia University. That means if everyone in the United States gave up meat and cheese one day a week for a year, the impact on greenhouse gases would be equivalent to that of taking 7.6 million cars off the road, according to the Environmental Working Group. Hard-core carnivores? If you just can't give up meat for even one day, you can still do your part for the planet, says Koch. Opt for antibiotic-free pastured beef and free-range chicken raised using sustainable farming practices.

to allergens. One more possibility: Acid reflux could be irritating your throat, which can make mucous production go haywire to clear out. You may need to take an OTC drug called a proton-pump inhibitor to put acid back in its place.