Rocky Mountain News

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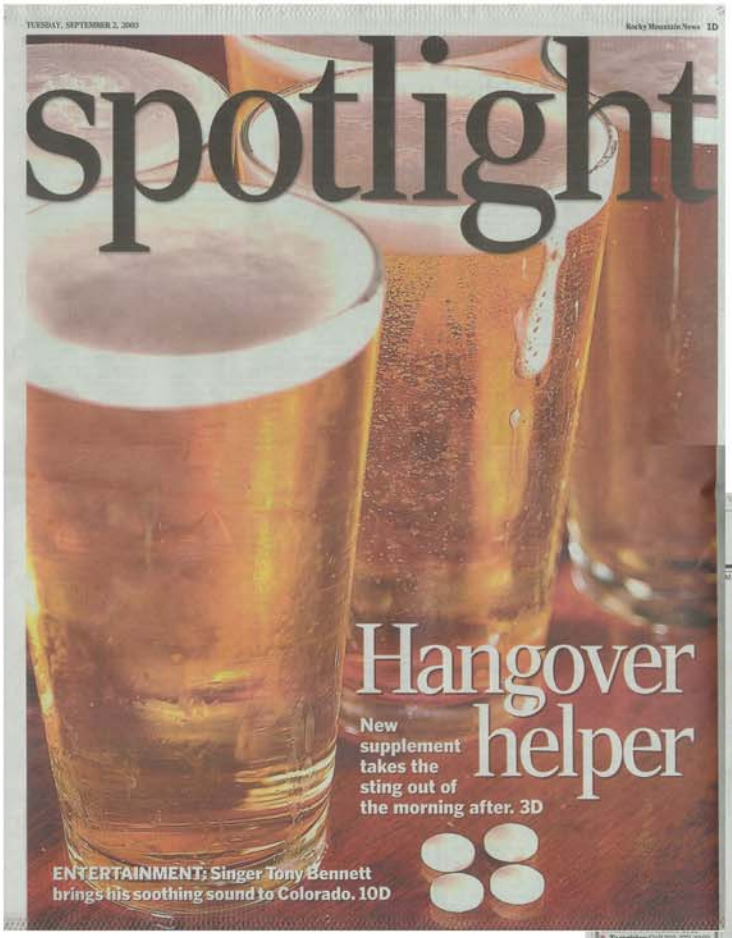

Hangover helper

New supplement takes the sting out of the morning after. 3D

ENTERTAINMENT: Singer Tony Bennett brings his soothing sound to Colorado. 10D

HEALTH

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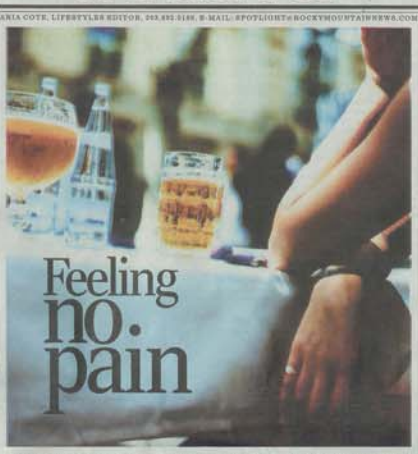

Feeling no pain

Supplement RU-21 eases hangovers, but critics fear downside

By Debra Melani
ROCKY MOUNTAIN NEWS

It's dusk as Jim Cimaat lowers the sails and battens down the hatches. Orange hues dance across the western sky as his wife hands him a cocktail. His body aches from his long day on the ocean, and he gladly drinks it.

The gentle rocking of the boat, and the warmth of the alcohol eventually lull his mind. He drinks one more. The waves crash; darkness falls. He has a third. A startlr night after a hard day's sailing. He's earned another.

Then morning comes and Cimaat pays.

"I'd usually have a drink before dinner, but if for some reason I'd get into a second drink, or three or four, I'd feel it a little bit the next day," said Cimaat, a 76-year-old Greeley resident who spent a decade sailing around the world after retiring from IBM in 1983.

Cimaat wouldn't have minded having some RU-21 on his voyage.

The pills, available on the Internet and scheduled to make their Colorado debut in General Nutrition Centers next month, have banished his hangover symptoms, Cimaat says.

With its origins in Russia, the hangover helper is gaining national attention as it nudges into the United States. Superwoodd Beverly Hills, Calif., has begun selling it online, and Rocky Mountain Vitamins in Denver is considering it.

> "... If you are well-nourished, a supplement such as this is not going to help you any further, because most of the components are parts of a good diet."
>
> **Boris Tabakoff**
> Pharmacol, CU Health Sciences Center

Unusually, according to the National Institutes of Health, Chiabert predicts that his product, born of a failed Russian military attempt to create a pill that would keep spies sober while they cajoled secrets out of the enemy, will help reduce those numbers.

An estimated 89 percent of Americans 18 and older, or 125 million, tip a glass at least periodically, according to a survey by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

RU-21, nicknamed the KGB pill in Russia, works by speeding the metabolism of alcohol and eliminating toxic byproducts from the system, Chiabert said. "Your body can only metabolize a certain amount of alcohol, basically one to two drinks an hour," he said.

When people consume more than their bodies can handle, damaging byproducts build up and blood-alcohol levels rise.

RU-21 more quickly breaks down the toxic byproducts into harmless compounds, easing hangover symptoms and, Chiabert says, future health problems.

But there's no proof of his long-term claim, said Boris Tabakoff, a pharmacist at the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center who focuses on alcohol research. Tabakoff has patented a product similar to RU-21 but has chosen not to market it.

"I have not seen any tests in humans that the product to protect her liver and skin.

But critics question the makers' claims about long-term health benefits and worry that the supplement will encourage people to drink to excess.

"This can really alleviate the social costs that are related to alcohol consumption," said Emil Chiabert, an executive with Spirit Sciences USA in California, which recently began marketing RU-21. In this country.

Alcohol costs the nation an estimated [illegible] billion a year, [illegible] billion in lost productivity, [illegible] billion in health care costs and [illegible] billion in other costs, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Moderate drinkers who contend with hangovers may have their silver bullet in RU-21, a supplement scheduled to make its Colorado debut in General Nutrition Centers next month. RU-21 works by speeding the metabolism of alcohol and eliminating toxic byproducts from the system, according to its marketer.

[illegible]

Testing the claims

When we heard about RU-21 — a proclaimed hangover cure — we decided to put it to the test. Volunteers from the newsroom conducted their experiments at home or with designated drivers. Here's what they had to say:

- **"I couldn't convince myself to pursue a heavy-duty hangover,** not even in the spirit of work-duty and scientific experimentation. But having five or six beers in an evening can leave me with a mild headache the next morning, so I figured I could endure that much discomfort for the greater good. On night one, I had five 12-ounce beers during and after dinner; the low-grade headache arrived on schedule in the morning. On night two, I had a comparable meal and the same five beers, this time taking one two-tablet dose of RU-21 as I cracked open the first, third and fifth brews. Come morning, the headache was conspicuously — and welcomely — absent."

Jay Caputo, 37

- **"After ingesting one RU-21 tablet after every two drinks** (the instructions are confusing: I later noticed it's one serving — or two pills — for every two drinks), I woke up the next morning feeling fine, if not downright chipper. I admit, as a trained professional, I'm not prone to hangovers. But when I do get one, I get it with a vengeance — headache, nausea, lethargy. But with the help of RU-21, I felt like playing at least 36 holes of golf. Too bad I had to work. The bartender who assisted us in our experiment wants me to report back to him on the results. I'm saying yes, not nay, to RU-21."

Tracy Parker, 40

- **"I thought I would put this stuff to the test by drinking microbrews,** something I enjoy occasionally that can leave a mark on me if I have more than three. The first night, I drank five in about two hours — without the aid of the pills. I woke up the next morning with a light but noticeable headache and felt sluggish until about noon. The next night, I tried the pills. Their aftertaste was citrusy but complemented the beer nicely. I had the same five brews, then threw one more down for good measure. I woke up the next morning without any of the nagging aches or usual hangover effects. I was still slightly drowsy, but since the supplement doesn't claim to prevent that, I'll cut it some slack."

[illegible]

To register: Call 303-572-3900

LOSING IT

If you've lost more than 60 pounds and you have the photos to prove it, the Discovery Health Channel wants to hear from you. The network is looking for Coloradans to profile on its new show, *I Lost It!* Call Gaylene Garcia at 303-450-8200 or e-mail her at gaylene@rgplt.com.

STRESSED OUT

45% of Americans say they live in a household where anger is a problem.

36% say stress is a problem in their lives.

16% say they have considered killing themselves because of past stress.

13% say they are on medication in hopes of improving their mood.

Source: The National Health and Stress Survey, conducted by Opinion Research Corporation International on behalf of Prevention, N.J., Aug. 18-31, 17

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