

Alcoholism



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Alcoholism in the United States

Alcoholism has become an epidemic in the United States. One in every 13 adults abuses alcohol or is considered alcoholic. Nearly 18 million Americans have an alcohol problem. Alcoholism does not discriminate in that it affects those of all ethnicities, gender, and income levels.

According to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, (NIAAA), alcoholism has become America's number one health problem by burdening our health care system and economy with costs of about \$185 billion per year. Moreover, alcoholism negatively affects one's family life, work relationships and productivity, health and well being, and may even result in permanent injury or death.

Defining Alcoholism

According to the NIAAA, alcoholism is a disease where one becomes dependent on alcohol. An alcohol dependent person will have the following symptoms:

1. *Alcohol cravings.* Feeling a strong "need" to drink
2. *Loss of control.* Unable to control the amount of one's drinking
3. *Physical dependence.* If alcohol use is stopped after a period of heavy alcohol consumption, and withdrawal symptoms occur (anxiety, nausea, shakiness, and/or sweating) the person is physically dependent on alcohol.
4. *Increased tolerance* of alcohol. A person must consume greater amounts of alcohol to get the affects they once got from only a few drinks.

Health Consequences of Alcoholism

There are several consequences to alcoholism, many of which are life threatening. Alcoholism can lead to liver diseases such as alcoholic hepatitis and cirrhosis of the liver. Alcoholism also increases the risk for developing heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke, certain forms of cancer, and pancreatitis, all of which can be life threatening if drinking persists. Fetal alcohol syndrome is a problem in the United States today due to the increased usage of alcohol during pregnancy. Fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS) is the leading "known" cause of mental retardation in children born with FAS.

Getting the Help You Need for Alcoholism

Alcoholism is not a "moral weakness" but a disease that is treatable if help is sought by one's health care provider. The sooner help is sought, the better the outcome. The health care provider will give a physical, psychological, and behavioral exam in order to determine if one is alcohol dependent and in need of a specialist for the treatment of alcoholism. The specialist will overview three types of treatment methods and one or more methods may be selected

depending on the extent of alcoholism in the individual. Below is a description of the 3 methods available to treat alcoholism:

1. Detoxification. This is a process of removing the physiological (physical) effects of alcohol from an alcoholic.
2. Prescribed medication. Different medicines can be prescribed (e.g. Antabuse) depending on a person's needs, that can help prevent a relapse of drinking.
3. Counseling. Individual and/or group counseling will occur which will help the individual to identify feelings and/or situations that cause one to drink.

Many programs will offer more than just counseling for the individual, often bringing in the family and/or friends for relationship therapy or counseling as well. In order to help the individual in all realms of his/her life, other services may be offered by the program such as assistance with legal issues, training for jobs, childcare and classes for parenting.

Alcohol Abuse

Alcohol abuse is different from alcoholism in that the cravings for alcohol, loss of control and physical dependence for alcohol are not as severe for one who is abusing alcohol. According to the NIAAA, the following are signs of alcohol abuse if repeated by an individual during a year's time:

- Inopportune drinking. The person drinks during physically hazardous situations, i.e. driving, operating machinery
- Legal problems due to alcohol abuse. The person is arrested a few times for driving under the influence or he/she commits a violent act while using alcohol.
- Does not finish or keep up with major responsibilities
- Does not stop drinking though the alcohol abuse is causing relationship problems.

Problems and risks associated with alcohol abuse and alcoholism

Alcohol abuse and alcoholism can take a toll on an individual and his/her relationships with friends and family in the home, at work, or out in public. Too much alcohol will negatively affect one's decision making abilities as well as his/her actions and reactions to a situation. The following are some relationship and legal problems which are affects of alcohol abuse as well as some statistics of injuries caused by alcohol use (National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, 2005):

Alcohol abuse has been associated with:

- Increased arguments/strained relationship resulting in separation of family members
- Strained/poor relationship with friends and/or coworkers

- Increased absence or tardiness to work
- Decrease in productivity and or quality of work resulting in job loss or demotion
- Committing or becoming the victim of a violent act resulting in
 1. ¼ of all emergency room admissions...
 2. ⅓ of all successful suicides...
 3. ½ of all homicides and domestic violence cases
- About 50% of all traffic fatalities
- Over half of all deaths due to fires

Recognizing an Alcohol Abuse Problem

The first step to helping oneself through an alcohol abuse problem is to know the signs of alcohol abuse. Below is a four-question self test developed by the Rutgers University Center on Alcohol Studies (New Jersey). The questions can be remembered best by the acronym CAGE. Someone who answers yes to any two CAGE questions is encouraged to contact an appropriate healthcare professional for assistance.

1. "Have you ever felt you should **cut down** on your drinking?"
2. "Have you been **annoyed** by people who criticize your drinking?"
3. "Have you felt bad or **guilty** about your drinking?"
4. "Have you ever had a drink first thing in the morning (as an "**eye opener**") to steady your nerves or get rid of a hangover?"

For a more extensive assessment, the National Council on Alcoholism has developed a series of 26 questions that can help someone determine if they need help. The questionnaire can be accessed at www.songdov.com/indexst.htm

Getting the Help You Need for Alcohol Abuse

Once the health care provider determines that one is in a pattern of alcohol abuse, steps will be taken to treat this problem. The first step is to pin point the situations and/or emotions that trigger drinking. Once these triggers have been identified then new methods of dealing with these triggers will be discussed. Second, a drinking goal will be made, depending on the personality type. One may choose to stop drinking all together or find a way to limit the amount of alcohol consumed at one time. Lastly, it is important to discuss and view the benefits of breaking the unhealthy drinking pattern.

Resources

National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, Inc. (NCADD)
Hope Line: (800) NCA-CALL / 800-622-2255
<http://www.ncadd.org>

National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAA)
Phone: (301) 443-3860
<http://www.niaaa.nih.gov>

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) World Services, Inc.
Phone: (212) 870-3003
<http://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org>

Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, Inc.
Phone: (757) 563-1600
<http://www.al-anon.alateen.org>

Local Support Groups

Alcoholism

Adult Intensive Outpatient Program: (321) 267-7773.

Alanon and Alateen: For family and friends of alcoholics. Meeting lists are available at all Brevard County libraries. (321) 639-0220.

Alcoholics Anonymous: Serving the county through Brevard Intergroup, 720 E. New Haven Ave., Suite 3, Melbourne. 24-hour hot line: 724-2247 or 633-0052.
www.aaspacecoast.com

Addictions

Center for Nonaddictive Living: Outpatient substance-abuse program for adults; offers evaluations and intensive counseling. (321) 951-2100.

PREVENT! of Brevard: Alcohol and drug treatment, support services and family counseling. (321) 259-7262.

Relapse Prevention: Outpatient treatment counseling. (321) 259-7262.

Hope Ministries: Provides help for emotionally wounded and hurting people through meetings and referrals. (321) 676-5588.