

## Alcoholism

Alcoholism refers the drinking of alcohol to such a degree that major aspects of one's life are seriously and repeatedly interfered with. These aspects include work, school, family relationships, personal safety and health. Alcoholism is considered a disease. It has known physical, psychological and social symptoms. An alcoholic continues to drink even despite the destructive consequences. Alcoholism is serious and progressive. It can be fatal if not treated. Alcoholism is a very complex disorder. An alcoholic who stops drinking for a while is considered recovering, not cured.

A person does not have to drink every day in order to be considered an alcoholic. Likewise, someone who drinks frequently or gets drunk every once and a while is not necessarily an alcoholic. It is possible to abuse alcohol for a short period of time without developing alcoholism. For example, some people may drink abusively during a personal crisis and then resume normal drinking. College students tend to drink more heavily than other age groups. It is often difficult to distinguish such heavy and abusive drinking from the early stages of alcoholism. How well the person can tolerate giving up alcohol for an extended time and the effects of drinking on the family, friends, work, and health, may indicate the extent of the alcohol problem.

More than ten million Americans are estimated to be alcoholic. Alcoholism is found in all ages, cultures and economic groups. It is estimated that 75 percent of alcoholics are male and 25 percent are female. Alcoholism is a worldwide problem, but is most widespread in France, Ireland, Poland, Scandinavia, Russia and the United States.

Some common symptoms of alcoholism in the early stages are constant drinking for relief of personal problems, an increase in one's tolerance for alcohol, memory lapses or blackouts while drinking, and an urgent craving for alcohol. In the middle and late phases, dependence on alcohol causes tremors and agitation only relievably by alcohol.

Most likely, a combination of biological, psychological, and cultural factors contribute to the development of alcoholism in any individual. Alcoholism often seems to run in families.

Although there is no conclusive indication of the alcoholic family member is associated, studies show that 50 to 80 percent of all alcoholics have had a close alcoholic relative. Some researchers believe that one inherits an addiction for alcohol. Studies on animals and twins seem to support this theory. One study suggests that a susceptibility to alcoholism may be linked to a gene on chromosome eleven.

Alcoholism may also be related to emotional problems. For example, alcoholism is sometimes associated with a family history of maniac-depression. Some alcoholics have used alcohol medicate a depressive disorder. Alcoholics commonly drown their depressed or anxious feelings with alcohol. Some may drink to reduce inhibitions or negative feelings. Many alcoholics share experiences of loneliness, frustration, or anxiety but there is no single personality type that will become an alcoholic.

Alcoholism is a complex disorder for which a combination of treatments may be necessary for recovery. If the alcoholic is in the acute phase of alcoholism and is suffering from complications such as delirium tremens or serious health problems, hospitalization may be necessary. Because alcoholism is a chronic condition however, hospitalization is only the first step toward recovery. Many alcoholics go through several hospital stays of detoxification, before committing themselves to a program for recovery. A comprehensive treatment plan can include various facilities. Facilities are available in most cities. No one can make an alcoholic commit himself to recovery. Some therapists suggest,

however, that family members may influence the alcoholics by not supporting drinking activities, by seeking therapy for themselves, and not joining the alcoholic's denial of the problem. The involvement of family members can aid the progress of recovery.

I feel that alcoholism is a major problem. It can cause the break up of families and marriages. It is important that if someone knows someone that is an alcoholic, they should try to get that person help. Alcoholism is very dangerous if not treated.