

Introduction

Alcohol dependence, or alcoholism, is when a person is dependent on alcohol and has little control over how much he or she drinks. Alcoholism is a disease that doesn't go away completely and usually gets worse if not treated. Luckily, with treatment and a commitment to stop, it is possible to get on the road to recovery.

This reference summary explains alcoholism, the health risks associated with it, and how to get sober.

Alcohol Dependence

Alcohol changes the balance of certain chemicals in the brain and makes the user feel happy. It also makes the user more impulsive.

The effects of alcohol go away after a short while and the person craves more alcohol in order to feel good again. This makes alcoholics keep drinking to continue feeling happy. Alcoholism is an addiction.

There are several factors that can lead to a person becoming addicted to alcohol. A major factor is genetics. A person with alcoholic family members has a much higher risk of alcoholism.

High levels of stress, emotional pain, or anxiety can lead to drinking in the hope that it might stop the feelings of pain and confusion. When a person has depression problems, it can also lead to excessive drinking.



Unfortunately, society often makes heavy drinking look “cool” or glamorous, which gives a message that it’s all right to drink a lot.

The Health Risks

Alcohol can cause a lot of health problems. Heavy drinking causes liver problems including hepatitis and cirrhosis, which is irreversible damage to the liver. It also can damage the pancreas and the lining of the stomach.



Alcoholism can lead to heart failure, stroke, high blood pressure and cardiomyopathy, which is damage to the heart muscle.

Excessive alcohol can cause permanent short-term memory loss, weakness of the eye muscles, bone loss causing broken bones, erectile dysfunction, menstrual problems, numbness in the hands and feet, and an increased risk of certain types of cancer.

If a pregnant woman drinks, it can cause the baby to have a small head, eyelids that are too short, heart defects and developmental disabilities.

Getting Sober

When a person is dependent on alcohol, just cutting back on how much he or she drinks will not work. Abstinence, or stopping drinking altogether, has to be a goal of treatment.

It often takes a family member, co-worker, or friend to convince an alcoholic to get treatment for their disease because denial is common with alcoholism. An alcoholic usually denies that he or she has a problem.

There are various ways for an alcohol-dependent person to get treatment. A very common form of treatment is regularly participating in a support group.



This document is for informational purposes and is not intended to be a substitute for the advice of a doctor or healthcare professional or a recommendation for any particular treatment plan. Like any printed material, it may become out of date over time. It is important that you rely on the advice of a doctor or a healthcare professional for your specific condition.

One of the most widely known support groups is Alcoholics Anonymous, or AA. Joining a support group is a way for the alcoholic to help him or herself by staying sober and figuring out healthy living habits.

Another form of treatment is making regular visits to a healthcare professional who treats alcoholism. Examples of such professionals are psychologists, psychiatrists or specialized internal medicine doctors.



Some alcoholics require treatment in which the alcoholic temporarily lives at the treatment facility. This is known as inpatient care. At the facility, the person undergoes detoxification, therapy, drug treatment and counseling.

Treatment will not work unless an alcoholic accepts that he or she is addicted and unable to control his or her drinking.

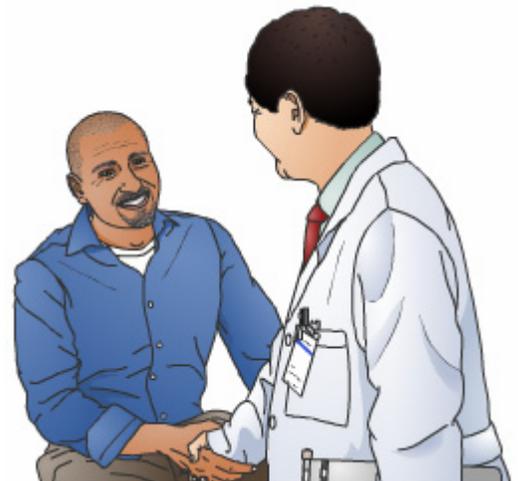
For those who do not drink yet but have a history of alcoholism in the family, a good way to prevent alcoholism is to know and recognize a family history of alcoholism and to refrain from drinking in the first place.

Conclusion

Alcoholism is a disease that can run in families. Long term treatment, counseling, and belonging to support groups may be needed to treat it.

Alcoholism causes a lot of serious health problems. Some of these can be permanent and deadly, such as cirrhosis.

Fortunately, with treatment and a commitment to stop, it is possible to get on the road to recovery.



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