

Alcoholism



**A Practical Approach
to Alcoholism**



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Introduction

Alcoholism is something that cannot be defined in simple terms. Alcoholism in general refers to the condition whereby there is a compulsion in man to keep consuming beverages with alcohol content which is harmful to health. The condition of alcoholism does not allow the person addicted to have any control over consumption in spite of being aware of the negative consequences resulting from it.

Even if the person who is an alcoholic faces social ridicule, family pressure, abuses, insults, etc he is in a condition whereby he cannot give up the habit or obsession which is beyond his control. His senses are totally under the influence of alcohol and any kind of an effort put forth by him to give up the habit does not work. He is thus totally dependent on the beverage.

An alcoholic has such a craving to drink that even if he happens to get into alcohol related trouble like drunken driving, losing his job, etc it does not stop him from considering giving up the habit.

Not everyone who consumes alcohol is an alcoholic. A person who consumes alcohol in limited quantities and is able to say no when he does not want to is not termed an alcoholic. He or she is just a social drinker.

One interesting theory proposed by writers is that alcohol in early days was discovered to replace the scarcity of unpolluted and safe drinking water. People preferred to die a slow death rather than dying overnight after drinking the extremely polluted and harmful water which carried many bacteria's, viruses and diseases.

Alcohol abuse

Alcohol abuse refers to the condition when a person who is under the influence of the beverage refuses to stop the undesirable practice in spite of facing problems repeatedly. Problems could be social, legal or personal. Damage caused from this could be both at the physical and mental level.

People who are under influence of alcohol generally do not bother about the condition or situation when they consume the beverage i.e. they do not bother to stay away from drinks even if they have to necessarily drive. Due to this they are at a risk of getting into trouble with the law.

Personal problems may arise due to intolerance of family members towards the attitude of irresponsibility which invariably arises out of this condition. Personal relationships get affected and life becomes filled with tension, stress and complexes.

Social problems may include misbehaviour in public causing embarrassment to oneself, one's family or friends who are around. People under the influence of alcohol generally tend to get loud and boisterous, or may become sober and melancholic. Their gait is also imbalanced and more often than not, they stagger and sometimes even fall down. They may even, without being conscious about it, abuse people around causing unpleasantness.





Alcohol dependence

Alcohol dependence can be defined as a condition wherein the person who is dependent exhibits certain other characteristics apart from those of alcohol abuse.

These include starting to drink only one particular brand of beverage, seeking to go to places where drinks are available, looking for the company of people who are drinkers, constant increase in alcohol tolerance level which means requiring more and more drinks in order to achieve that state of intoxication, going through noticeable withdrawal symptoms at the physical level after a certain period of time without drinks, drinking again to put an end to withdrawal symptoms, not being able to stay away from drinks even after repeatedly trying to give up, etc.

It is easier to treat or help people who are just alcohol abusers in contrast to those who are alcohol dependent. Alcohol abusers can sometimes be treated even by counselling and educating them on the dangers of drinking.

Alcohol dependents have to necessarily take help from the treatment clinics where they undergo detoxification, medical treatment, constant counselling, etc.

According to scientists, the condition of alcohol dependence can arise due to complex genetic disorders or due to environmental factors which include influence of family members or friends.

Symptoms

You can recognize a person who has been drinking severely with various symptoms he exhibits. These symptoms increase over a period of time. Early signs if left unattended may lead to alcohol abuse and eventually to alcohol dependence.

Drunkenness is the state a person reaches when he is intoxicated. Intoxication is achieved by consuming alcohol to the extent that it impairs the physical and mental faculties of a person.

Symptoms as seen earlier includes imbalance in the gait, poor or no coordination, slurring of speech, reddening of the eyes, flushed look on the face, frequent hiccups, becoming unaware of surroundings and therefore uninhibited and behaviour which is not characteristic of the person. This in turn creates a lot of tension for the family and friends of the person concerned.

The person who is drunk also exhibits swinging emotions. While he is angry one moment he becomes sad and reflective the next. Depression swings to euphoria in a short span of time. He is depressed and contemplative one moment and jovial, exuberant and light hearted the next.

Hangover the next day is another condition whereby the drinker may suffer from acute headaches, nausea, vomiting and is very uncomfortable. In order to get over these symptoms, some drinkers take another drink early in the morning.





Drunkenness or intoxication is not a disease but only a temporary state resulting from excessive alcohol consumption. This state exists only until the effect of alcohol in the system is prevalent. It is a type of a disorder of the mind occurring due to certain chemical reactions in the brain of the intoxicated person. The person is not actually out of touch with what is real even though he may be disoriented.

Types of problems related to alcoholism

Binge Drinking – The habit of drinking prevalent among mostly young people in the age group of 18 to 21 is called Binge drinking. This kind of drinking is mostly prevalent among college students. Binge drinking is a condition where men take upto four or five drinks in one session and women take a minimum of three drinks per session.

Students who indulge in binge drinking get into drinking related troubles often like injury due to accidents, misbehaviour with higher authorities, missing classes, hangovers, etc.

Early signs which have to be heeded are heavy drinking even while driving and other high risk situations, drinking until a person blacks out or loses his consciousness, marked behavioural changes like uncontrollable anger erupting violently, etc.

From exhibiting these early symptoms, the drinker progresses on to the stage of alcohol abuse whereby he gets into trouble at work, with the law and at home frequently and yet does not stop his excessive drinking.

The next progressive level is when the drinker becomes an alcoholic or alcohol dependent whereby he or she experiences extreme symptoms with loss of control over alcohol related craving and severe withdrawal symptoms.

Identifying the problem

Honesty –

Being honest is the first prerequisite for diagnosing alcohol related problems if any. The drinker has to be honest in his answers when he is being questioned about his feelings, pattern of drinking, thought process, etc.

This is very important as the first thing any drinker will tend to do is to deny any kind of a problem. They tend to put in every effort to convince the person who is questioning them that they do not have any problem which requires treatment. All drinkers resist treatment.

If it is not possible to make the drinker honest with his answers it is very difficult to diagnose the level of problem accurately and start the treatment.

