

Alcoholism and Alcohol Abuse

Today, nearly 14 million Americans, 1 in every 13 teens and adults, abuse alcohol or are alcoholics. Several more teens and adults engage in high risk drinking behaviors that can lead to alcohol problems. In addition, over half of men and women in the United States report that one or more of their close friends or relatives have a drinking problem.

What is Alcoholism?

Alcoholism is a PROGRESSIVE, long-TERM disease involving a MENTAL and PHYSICAL need for ALCOHOL. Alcoholism does not DISCRIMINATE among RACE, religion, SEX or age.

Alcoholism is a CHRONIC or long-term DISEASE that is characterized by the following:

- CRAVING: A strong NEED or COMPULSION to drink.
- Loss of CONTROL: The INABILITY to STOP drinking once a person has BEGUN.
- Physical DEPENDENCE: The episodes of WITHDRAWAL symptoms such as NAUSEA, sweating, SHAKINESS, and ANXIETY, when you STOP using alcohol after PERIODS of HEAVY drinking.

Tolerance

When the body becomes ACCUSTOMED to or builds up a RESISTANCE to a drug, the body has DEVELOPED a TOLERANCE to the drug. Tolerance causes the DRINKERS body to NEED increasingly LARGER amounts of ALCOHOL to achieve the EFFECT that was ORIGINALLY produced. Alcoholism has LITTLE to do with what KIND of alcohol one drinks, how LONG someone has been DRINKING, or even exactly how MUCH alcohol one DRINKS. It does have a great DEAL to do with a person's UNCONTROLLABLE need for ALCOHOL.

Recent STUDIES have demonstrated that for many people a PREDISPOSITION to alcoholism may be INHERITED. It is also IMPORTANT to recognize that ASPECTS of a person's ENVIRONMENT, including PEER pressure along with the AVAILABILITY of alcohol are also significant INFLUENCES.

Alcohol Abuse

Alcohol ABUSE differs from ALCOHOLISM. Alcohol abuse is a PATTERN of drinking that RESULTS in ONE or more well-defined BEHAVIORS within a 12 month period. Alcohol ABUSE does not include the extremely strong CRAVING for alcohol, loss of CONTROL or PHYSICAL dependence. The four SYMPTOMS of alcohol are:

- FAILURE to complete MAJOR work, school or home RESPONSIBILITIES.
- Drinking in SITUATIONS that are physically DANGEROUS, such as DRINKING and DRIVING or when OPERATING machinery.
- Having ONGOING alcohol-related LEGAL problems. Such as being ARRESTED for DWI or physically HURTING someone while drunk.
- Continuing DRINKING despite having ongoing RELATIONSHIP problems that are CAUSED or made WORSE by the EFFECTS of alcohol.

Based on what we have LEARNED, excessive drinking can RESULT in physical DAMMAGE to the BODY, can INCREASE the RISK of getting some DISEASES and can make other diseases WORSE. The long-term EFFECTS of alcohol ABUSE not only has CONSEQUENCES for the DRINKER, but also for those AROUND him/her as well. It can become more DIFFICULT to deal with STRESS or SOCIAL interactions without DRINKING. Bad BEHAVIOR often associated with EXCESSIVE drinking can DAMAGE our relationships with our FRIENDS, family and LOVED ones. In addition, alcohol ABUSE

can also have serious LEGAL consequences, such as DWI
or DRUNK and DISORDERLY charges.