

What to look for...

The following symptoms are associated with abuse of alcohol:

- temporary blackouts or memory loss.
- recurrent arguments or fights with family members or friends.
- continuing use of alcohol to relax, to cheer up, to sleep, to deal with problems, or to feel "normal".
- work, money and family problems.
- headache, anxiety, insomnia, nausea, or other unpleasant symptoms when you stop drinking.
- loss of appetite and insomnia.
- attacks of trembling and sweating.
- delirious attacks.
- kidney trouble and peptic ulcers.
- broken capillaries on the face; a husky voice; shaking hands; severe diarrhoea; and drinking alone, in the mornings, or in secret. These symptoms are specifically associated with chronic alcoholism.

Consumed in moderation, alcohol can be of benefit as a relaxant, can encourage the appetite and produce a feeling of well-being. However, when consumed in excess, alcohol is poisonous to human systems and is considered a drug.

Chronic alcoholism is a progressive, potentially fatal disease, characterised by an constant craving for, increased tolerance of, physical dependence upon, and loss of control over drinking alcohol.

Alcoholism can cause physical problems such as hypoglycaemia, kidney disease, brain and heart damage, enlarged blood vessels in the skin, chronic gastritis, and pancreatitis.

Alcoholism can also lead to impotence in men, damage to the foetus in pregnant women, and an elevated risk of cancer of the larynx, oesophagus, stomach, pancreas, and upper gastrointestinal tract.

Alcoholics rarely eat nutritionally adequate meals, they are likely to have nutritional deficiencies. Heavy drinkers typically have impaired liver function, and at least 1 in 5 develops cirrhosis.

Causes

The causes of alcoholism are a combination of genetic, physical, psychological, environmental, and social factors that vary among individuals. Genetic factors are considered crucial... A given person's risk of becoming an alcoholic is four to five times greater if a parent is alcoholic as children grow up copying one parent. Some children of alcohol abusers, however, overcome the hereditary pattern by becoming teetotallers.

Drinking is socially acceptable and approved cultural activity therefore some people, due to upbringing and conditioning are more inclined to become alcoholics than others.

Certain professions are more conducive alcoholism, extensive socialising and the open availability of drink are causes in these cases.

Traditional Treatment

Alcoholic's main aim in treatment is to abstain from any form of alcohol and this is often difficult and complicated by denial.

Once the alcoholic accepts he or she has a problem and is willing to stop drinking, treatment can begin. He or she must understand that alcoholism is curable and must be motivated to change.

Treatment has two stages...

1. Withdrawal... sometimes called detoxification - and

2. Recovery.

Because withdrawal does not stop the craving for alcohol, recovery is often difficult to maintain. For a person in an early stage of alcoholism, withdrawal may bring anxiety and poor sleep.

Withdrawal from long-term dependence may bring the uncontrollable shaking, spasms, panic, and hallucinations of delirium tremens (DT). If not treated professionally, people with DT have a mortality rate of more than 10 percent, so withdrawal from late-stage alcoholism should be attempted only at an in-patient centre.

Treatment may involve one or more medications. They must be used with care and supervision, since they may be addictive and can have serious side effects.

Because an alcoholic remains susceptible to becoming dependent again, the key to recovery is total abstinence. Recovery also involves education programs, group therapy, family involvement, and participation in self-help groups.

Alternative/Natural Treatments

Once an alcoholic accepts his or her condition and stops using alcohol, a number of alternative therapies can assist the recovery process.

- Massage - can help relax and can aid the stress of withdrawal symptoms
- Herbal Remedies and Nutritional supplements such as the B Complex, Vitamin C, and a multi-vitamin capsule, beta-carotene and Zinc, Magnesium and EPO. For withdrawal symptoms for herbal mixtures.
- Various relaxation and meditation techniques
- Nutrition and diet - eat plenty of salads and vegetables, drink fresh juices and avoid fatty foods.
- Blood sugar levels may need stabilising - eliminating certain dietary sugars prove helpful in some cases.
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Other ways to help with Alcoholism

To help in learning to live without the need for alcohol the alcoholic must...

- Avoid people and places that make drinking the norm, and find new, non-drinking friends.
- Join a self-help group.
- Enlist the help of family and friends.
- Replace your negative dependence on alcohol with positive dependencies such as a new hobby or volunteer work with church or civic groups.
- Start exercising. Exercise releases chemicals in the brain that provide a "natural high." Even a walk after dinner can be tranquillising.

Dietary Considerations

Develop a healthy diet of fresh fruit and vegetables (watching for certain fruits and vegetables which may be high in sugar) and consume foods high in B and C group vitamins such as wholemeal bread, brown rice, oats, bananas, citrus fruit, broccoli and parsley.

Drink plenty of filtered water and be sure to visit a qualified dietician or medical practitioner to obtain a diet suitable for you.

When to seek further professional advice

- you have any of the symptoms listed in the description section and are unable to stop drinking on your own. You need medical intervention to treat alcoholism.
- you find your daily intake of alcohol increasing as you become more tolerant.
- you drink regularly and experience chronic or periodic depression. You may be at risk of suicide.
- you have tried to stop drinking and experienced withdrawal symptoms such as headache, anxiety, insomnia, nausea, or delirium tremens. You need medical attention by a Doctor or a treatment centre.