



ALCOHOLISM



BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

A chronic, progressive disease that involves dependence on, or an addiction to, alcohol. It involves:

- Craving: A strong need or urge to drink.
- Loss of control: Not being able to stop drinking once drinking has begun.
- Physical dependence: Withdrawal symptoms, such as upset stomach, sweating, shakiness, and anxiety after stopping drinking.
- Tolerance: The need to drink greater amounts of alcohol to get "high".

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Need for alcohol at the start of the day.
- Use of alcohol to relieve stress or forget problems.
- Insomnia and nightmares.
- Vision, hearing, perception, and alertness problems.
- Monday-morning hangovers and loss of workdays.
- Making promises to limit or stop drinking, but failing to follow through.
- Lying about drinking. Sneaking drinks at work or school.
- Anger and guilt when asked about drinking.
- Blackouts, personality and mood changes, confusion, memory loss, depression, anxiety, and fatigue.
- Tremors, violent shakes, hallucinations, or convulsions when there is no alcohol in the body.
- Poor nutrition and poor hygiene. Bad breath.
- Lack of sexual interest and loss of potency.
- Money, work, or family problems.

CAUSES

Not fully understood. It appears to be a combination of genetic, environmental, and personality factors.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Family history of alcoholism.
- Personal history of other substance abuse.
- Genetic factors. May affect the way people's bodies process and respond to alcohol.
- Personality factors, such as needing a lot of praise and reassurance, feeling inadequate or unsure, low frustration level, being impulsive or aggressive.
- Cultural factors. Some ethnic groups have high alcoholism rates for either social or biological reasons.
- Factors such as alcohol being available, affordable, and socially acceptable.
- Personal history of emotional or psychiatric disorders.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

Avoid or limit alcohol. Women have no more than one drink a day and men no more than two drinks a day.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Treatment has varying success rates. Some people are able to quit on their own. Relapse is somewhat common, but many people have a full recovery.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Damage to the brain, liver, heart, and other organs.
- Fetal alcohol syndrome (children of alcoholic mothers).
- Without treatment, alcoholism can be fatal.
- Suicide or fatal motor vehicle accidents.



DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- Your health care provider will do a physical exam and ask about your symptoms. You may be asked verbal questions or to fill out a written form about your alcohol use. These can help identify problem drinking. Medical tests may include blood and urine studies.
- Treatment depends on the severity of the alcohol problem, other illnesses (physical, emotional, or mental), and how motivated you are to change. Treatment usually involves withdrawal of alcohol and detoxification, and long-term support to help you remain sober.
- Specific treatment steps include counseling (may be all that is needed), drugs (in some cases), inpatient care at a hospital or treatment center, or referral to a health care provider who treats addiction problems.
- You may benefit from self-help groups, such as Alcoholics Anonymous, or another support group.

MEDICATIONS

Your health care provider may prescribe:

- Drugs that reduce the craving for alcohol.
- Drugs that cause unpleasant physical symptoms when alcohol is consumed.
- Drugs that reduce the pleasure of alcohol.
- Drugs for withdrawal symptoms, as needed.

ACTIVITY

Exercise daily. It helps in maintaining physical and mental well-being.

DIET

Eat a normal, well-balanced diet. Vitamin supplements may be recommended.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has symptoms of alcoholism. It is an illness that can be treated.

- You have a relapse after recovery.

