



ALCOHOLISM: SYMPTOMS, EFFECTS, AND TREATMENT OPTIONS

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Alcoholism: Symptoms, Effects, and Treatment Options

The American Psychiatric Association considers alcoholism a serious condition, causing pervasive problems in one's life, "Alcohol use disorder (AUD) involves frequent or heavy alcohol drinking that becomes difficult to control and leads to problems such as in relationships, work, school, family, or other areas" (American Psychiatric Association, 2023). Although alcoholism is the most common addiction, most people are not entirely

knowledgeable about the condition. Because the disorder is so widespread, it is important to know the symptoms, causes, and treatment of alcoholism.

Symptoms

Symptoms of alcoholism vary in severity. The main symptom is that one is unable to control the quantity and frequency of alcohol consumption and is unsuccessful in an attempt to cut back. An alcoholic spends excessive time drinking or recovering from drinking and craving alcohol. Alcoholics are unable to give up the alcohol even when it causes serious problems at work, with family, or in relationships. The early signs of addiction can be that the person centers their routine around drinking. A person may use alcohol so much that they create dangerous situations, such as drinking while driving or swimming.

Overconsuming alcohol can result in a tolerance effect; one needs an incremental increase in the amount of alcohol to obtain the “high” state that one craves. When

trying to quit alcohol after using it excessively, there are withdrawal symptoms like nausea, sweating, and shaking that can only stop when one continues drinking. A person is considered to have an alcohol disorder when symptoms correlate with those of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) of the American Psychiatric Association.

There are a lot of cases of alcohol abuse that go undiagnosed because many people do not want to admit they have a problem or do not recognize when they have the telltale symptoms. A person also might want to keep their drinking habit a secret because of its social stigma. (Sussex Publishers, n.d.) The Mayo Clinic warns medical caregivers that there is a lot of denial with an addiction, so a diagnosis is often made by talking to people close to a patient since they are the ones who often recognize addiction behaviors that the alcoholic ignores.

Causes

A person starts to drink to excess for many reasons. One major reason is psychological problems. Many people turn to alcohol consumption to deal with trauma or other deep psychological disorders that have not yet been diagnosed. There is also the aspect of a person learning to drink from the people around them and if their family is dysfunctional. There is a genetic factor as well, according to Mayo Clinic, since for some people, alcohol has a stronger impact than on others. Also, over time, the brain may begin to function differently to make drinking alcohol more favorable.

A major factor leading to alcohol abuse in adulthood is starting alcohol consumption at a young age. In a study, the relationship between a person's childhood and alcoholic parents showed that those who grew up with alcoholic parents are more likely to develop alcoholism. This study looked at nine different childhoods, and the ones

with alcoholic parents had the highest risk, 20.3% of respondents reported parental alcohol abuse. Having a childhood surrounded by alcoholics is a critical predictive element in a youth developing alcoholism. (Anda et al., 2002)

Anda et. al (2002) also discovered that having alcoholic parents often produced a simultaneous development of depression. (Anda et al., 2002) The study found that the same traumatic experiences that could develop alcoholism could, in turn, develop depression.

Depression can lead a young person to turn to alcohol. It is common for people to have both depression and alcoholism. In *The Psychology of Alcoholism*, George Cutten posits that once a person starts drinking more, alcohol takes a toll on the body and builds up addictive effects. (Cutten, 1907) Cutten discusses the biological factors of drinking. He mentions two theories. The depression theory sees alcohol as a depressant, and so it

impairs mental and bodily functions. The second is the stimulation theory, which sees alcohol as a selective stimulant, meaning it affects your thought-making decisions.

The blood is also affected by alcohol, losing nutritive qualities and oxygenation and affecting blood circulation. A normal blood supply is necessary for healthy emotions. An inefficient blood supply from the use of alcohol creates unhealthy emotions. The selfless emotions decline and the selfish emotions will strengthen with the use of alcohol. These uncontrolled emotions also cause a lack of control over consuming alcohol. The emotions will fluctuate with the quantity and quality of blood that is affected by the drinking. The interplay of biological factors and emotions explains why it may be hard to quit drinking. The emotions that cause alcohol craving is influenced by the already alcohol-regulated blood supply.

Treatment

There are several treatments for alcohol disorders. One is the detoxification and withdrawal method, which can be done in a treatment center or hospital and might require sedation. The patient refrains from drinking long enough for the body to detox the body from the influence of alcohol. It can take from two to seven days. It is often an inpatient experience to help control urges by not having access to alcohol. This method can be done at home with the proper support and following a structured plan.

Second, some medicines will help prevent drinking. Some of these medicines don't control the urge to drink but, after taken, will cause unpleasant side effects if drinking alcohol then occurs. Some medicines repress the good feelings one gets from alcohol to help combat cravings. These medications can be used as pills or injections. Finally, there are therapy and support programs

for the alcoholic seeking a way out of addiction.

Counseling may treat the condition by uncovering psychological issues that lead to drinking. Support groups can help in the same way. Even after alcoholism is treated, continuing support programs will help prevent regression and help in maintaining a lifestyle. As alcoholism often develops from emotional or psychological conditions, it is important to continue support programs.

Early treatment is key to successful recovery from alcoholism. Alcoholism's origin in someone often starts when they are small, and so being informed about the condition and what it is can save someone from suffering from alcoholism for too long. Not keeping prejudices and being informed can always help everyone. Knowing about the condition is important for the rates of alcoholism in the U.S. to go down.

Conclusion

This exploration into alcoholism has highlighted its profound impact, recognized by the American Psychiatric Association (APA). The discussion on symptoms, causes, and treatment underscores the complex nature of alcohol use disorder (AUD) and the need for informed interventions. The DSM-5's criteria, focusing on the inability to control alcohol consumption, is central to identifying and addressing AUD. Childhood experiences, particularly with alcoholic parents, emerge as pivotal factors influencing alcoholism, often coinciding with depression. George Cutten's insights reveal the physiological toll of alcohol on the body and emotions. While informative, the paper could benefit from recent research inclusion and considering cultural influences on alcoholism. Looking ahead, future research should explore AUD across diverse contexts, acknowledging cultural nuances for tailored interventions.

Fostering awareness and informed interventions are critical to addressing alcoholism effectively, contributing to reduced prevalence and enhanced treatment strategies. The intricate interplay of factors underscores the urgency of ongoing research for improved prevention and intervention efforts.

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