

ALCOHOL DEPENDENCY



Alcohol is addictive. Drinking large quantities of alcohol regularly increases the risk of becoming alcohol dependent. The most obvious signs alcohol dependency are:

Finding it hard go from one day to the next without having a drink & drinking first thing in the morning.

Increased tolerance i.e. an increase in the amount and or frequency of alcohol required to feel it's effects.

Planning life and social events around drinking habits.

Having difficulty stopping drinking even when dependence has been recognized.

Alcohol dependence is influenced by a number of different factors:

Family attitudes towards alcohol can be inherited.

Some high pressure occupations can be associated with social drinking, which may increase the risk of dependence.

Highly stressful events, like a death in the family, may evoke heavy drinking.

Alcohol dependency was once considered a problem associated with middle age. However, figures from the Department of Health show that alcohol addiction is now more common among younger people.

ALCOHOL WITHDRAWAL SYNDROME

Stopping drinking immediately when addicted to alcohol may seem like the best thing to do. However, the symptoms of alcohol withdrawal can be painful and distressing, in some cases sudden abstinence can be life threatening. People who only drink once in a while rarely have withdrawal symptoms.

The symptoms of alcohol withdrawal range from mild to severe, and may include:

- Shakiness
- Sweats
- Anxiety
- Irritability
- Fatigue
- Depression
- Headaches
- Insomnia
- Nightmares
- Decreased appetite

More severe withdrawal symptoms may also include fever, convulsions, Delirium Tremens (also called 'The DTs'). People who have 'The DTs' may experience confusion, anxiety, and even hallucinations. This can be very serious if not treated by a doctor.

Alcohol withdrawal occurs because continuous exposure to alcohol creates a physiological dependence. The body begins to treat this state as the normal. When alcohol is not present in the blood stream the brain recognizes this as abnormal and the central nervous system goes into a highly defensive mode, demanding the addition of alcohol in order to return to 'normal'.

Anyone who thinks they have an addiction to alcohol should consult their GP, local alcohol awareness charity, drop in centre or alcohol withdrawal clinic, before attempting to stop drinking unassisted.

ALCOHOL DETOXIFICATION

Once admitted for recovery from alcoholism, the treatment includes reducing withdrawal symptoms, preventing complications, and therapy to assist with stopping drinking (abstinence).

Treatment of Mild to Moderate symptoms

Sufferers with mild-to-moderate alcohol withdrawal symptoms can often be treated as an outpatient. Usually someone is assigned to stay with the patient during this process who can keep an eye on them and provide support. Daily visits to the health care provider are then required until a stable non-drinking state has been established.

Treatment usually includes the prescription of sedative drugs to help ease withdrawal symptoms, routine blood tests to check blood alcohol levels and patient and family counseling to discuss the long-term issue of alcoholism.

It is important that the patient moves to a living situation which helps and supports them to stay off alcohol. Some areas have housing options that provide a supportive environment for this purpose. Permanent and life-long abstinence from alcohol is the best defence for those who have undergone withdrawal.

Treatment of Moderate to Severe symptoms

People with moderate to severe symptoms of alcohol withdrawal may need hospital treatment or another facility which treats severe alcohol withdrawal. Patients are watched closely for hallucinations and other signs of Delirium Tremens ('The DTs').

Treatment may include; Monitoring of blood pressure, body temperature, heart rate, and levels of different chemicals in the blood, fluids or medications administered through an intravenous drip (IV), and or sedation using Benzodiazepines, until withdrawal is complete.