

ALCOHOLISM



Alcoholism is described as having a physical compulsion and mental obsession with the consumption of alcohol over and above the brain's ability to control it, often manifesting itself as abnormal cravings for alcohol at abnormal times of the day.

Those suffering with alcoholism often find it difficult to know how or when to stop drinking or even to recognize and acknowledge that a problem with alcohol exists.

RECOGNIZING THE SIGNS



Heavy drinkers moving towards dependency generally exhibit the following:

Intermittent and unsuccessful attempts at quitting.

Promises to self and other frequently made and broken.

Switching brands or beverage.

Attempts to limit drinking to certain times of the day.

Becoming drunk when intending to stay sober even though the incentive is there.

Periods of depression and anxiety about mental wellbeing.

Self loathing, neglect and self pity.

Inability to stay out of trouble even though it affects friends and family.

Once a person has crossed the line from heavy drinker to compulsive drinker it is unlikely that they will ever be able to return to 'normal' social drinking (once an alcoholic, always an alcoholic, or reformed alcoholic).

QUITTING & ABSTINENCE



Effectively an alcoholic is 'allergic' to alcohol and as with any allergy the sufferer is advised to avoid the cause of the reaction, making abstinence a focal part of many alcoholic reform programmes.

Quitting alcohol alone can lead to painful withdrawal symptoms which are the main cause of relapse in recovering alcoholics. There are many organizations available to assist in the controlled recovery of alcoholism e.g. NHS, private and charitable detoxification clinics.

Admittance to detox. clinics is for the most part voluntary however a G.P. or court can refer patients for treatment if they are deemed to be a danger to themselves or others.

Assisted detoxification usually involves isolation from outside influences for a month or more and treatment of the withdrawal symptoms with drugs including benzodiazepines and counselling sessions to promote abstinence and prevent relapse.

SOURCES OF HELP AND ADVICE

Drinkline is the UK national alcohol help line. If you're worried about your own or someone else's drinking, you can call this free help line, in complete confidence, 24 hours a day. Call in the UK 0800 917 8282.

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) is a free self-help group. Its "12-step" programme involves getting sober with the help of regular support groups. AA's belief is that people with drink problems need to give up alcohol permanently.

Al-Anon Family Groups offer support and understanding to the families and friends of problem drinkers, whether they're still drinking or not. Alateen is part of Al-Anon and can be attended by 12 to 17 year olds who are affected by another person's drinking, usually a parent.

Addaction is a UK-wide treatment agency that helps individuals, families and communities to manage the effects of drug and alcohol misuse.

Connexions Direct provides access to information and advice on a range of issues for 13- to 19-year-olds, including safe drinking. Information on local services is also available.

Adfam is a national charity working with families affected by drugs and alcohol. Adfam operates an online message board and database of local support groups.

The National Association for Children of Alcoholics (NACOA) provides a free, confidential telephone and email help line for children of alcohol-dependent parents and others concerned their welfare. <http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/alcohol/Pages/AlcoholSupport.aspx>