

Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism

Frequently Asked Questions

What is alcoholism?

Alcoholism or alcohol dependence is a disease that has four main features. These are:

- Craving or a strong need to drink alcohol.
- Loss of control or not being able to stop drinking once you have started.
- Physical dependence on alcohol which is having withdrawal symptoms after you stop drinking.
- Tolerance or the need to drink more to more to get the same effect.



Is alcoholism a disease?

Yes. Alcoholism is a chronic disease. It lasts a lifetime.

Can you inherit alcoholism?

The risk for developing alcoholism does run in families. Certain genes can put you at risk. Your lifestyle may also put you at risk. This includes having friends who drink, having a great deal of stress in your life and alcohol being available. All these may increase your risk of developing an alcohol problem.

Can alcoholism be cured?

No. Alcoholism is a chronic disease. An alcoholic can stop drinking and be in recovery, but have a relapse and start to drink. It's important that an alcoholic not drink.

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Can alcoholism be treated?

Yes. Treatment may use both counseling and medications to help a person stop drinking. Most alcoholics need help to manage their disease. Support and treatment helps many people to stop drinking and rebuild their lives.

What if you think a family member is drinking too much?

Talk to your health care team about getting help for yourself and your loved one. There are support groups available for family members. These include Al-anon for adults and Alateen for teenagers.

Does alcohol affect everyone in the same way?

No. Alcohol can affect women and older adults differently compared to men or younger adults. Women feel the effects of alcohol more compared to men. Aging slows the body's ability to break down alcohol. For older adults this means that alcohol stays in the system longer. For anyone, taking medicines and drinking alcohol can be dangerous.

How can a person get help for an alcohol problem?

There are many ways to get help.

- Talk with your health care team about getting help.
- Groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous can help.
- Check in your community for your local alcohol/substance abuse information center.
- Veterans should contact their local VA to get help.

