

Alcoholism Examined

By Jim Rachels



Alcohol is one of the most widely used psychoactive drugs in the world. And it has been part of many different cultures for hundreds of years. Problems with alcohol can happen to anyone. It doesn't matter if you're rich or poor, one religion or another or one race or another, alcoholism does not discriminate. Drinking alcohol has been linked to many problems with the body. Some things that happen are things like gastrointestinal problems, various cancers and metabolic issues. And the more someone uses alcohol the more likely they come to depend on it mentally and physically. Then there are the withdrawals that many people go through while trying to stop drinking alcohol. These come along with many terrible symptoms.

It is estimated that about 15 million people suffer from alcoholism or some use the term "alcohol use disorder." Also, approximately 3.3 million people die each year from alcohol-related causes. That beats some of the larger illnesses such as malaria, tuberculosis and AIDS. And 80-90% of people with problems with alcohol never seek out the help they need. And it is said that 90% of those people in recovery end up relapsing after only a few years of sobriety.

I found one definition: "A chronic disease characterized by uncontrolled drinking and preoccupation with alcohol." It also says "Alcoholism is the inability to control drinking due to a physical and emotional dependence on alcohol."

I think this is a great definition and very accurate. I personally struggled with alcoholism for many years and can relate to this. It started out as something I was able to control but then eventually that led to emotional and physical dependence.

Many people nowadays are straying away from the word alcoholism. Now they are leaning towards using the term "Alcohol Use Disorder" or AUD. AUD covers more of the crowd that is drinking such as binge drinkers, heavy drinkers to the chronic daily drinker.

So what are some of the signs that someone is developing an alcohol use disorder? First is the increased intake of alcohol. This in turn leads to a higher tolerance. Some people developing this may have withdrawal symptoms after they stop drinking, things like shaky hands, nausea and vomiting. Also, some people will start drinking much earlier in the day compared to when they used to start drinking to try to avoid any withdrawal symptoms.

Alcohol starts off as a mental obsession that quickly can lead to physical dependence. This is when it becomes incredibly difficult to quit drinking. Many people have tried time and time again only to keep on failing at their attempts at sobriety. Some of the other signs and symptoms are things like wanting to cut down your alcohol intake but are unable to.

Continuing to drink even though it is affecting your life negatively, giving up social activities and hobbies that once brought you joy. Also using alcohol dangerously such as driving under the influence. Another sign is your tolerance continuing to go up and you need more and more alcohol to try to get the same feeling you got when you first started drinking. People also tend to neglect their responsibilities as well.

So what qualifies someone as an alcoholic? There are many things to be on the lookout for. First is a problem controlling the amount of alcohol someone is consuming in a given amount of time. Another is they drink until they black out. Something else that is common is someone continuing drinking despite all the negative consequences it causes.

Alcoholism is a terrible disorder. It destroys the lives of so many people who are fighting this dreadful malady. It can cause financial, legal and social problems. And there are many other areas of your life that drinking affects such as relationships with friends, family and even employers. Some marriages end in divorce due to heavy drinking. Many people end up losing friends, family and their jobs. It affects every part of their daily life.

So what exactly happens in our brains to make someone more prone to battle with alcohol issues? Some believe that the main reason for alcohol issues is our reward system going haywire, it is not believed to be a moral failing. When consuming alcohol your brain is releasing dopamine into your system which is what the reward system does. This in time become unregulated and leads to less dopamine being released and than your brain craves more alcohol as it is craving a dopamine release.

I also think that since we are speaking specifically about alcohol issues Alcoholics Anonymous should be brought up. For quite some time this was the only thing that was available to alcoholics that wanted to get better and stop their drinking. Alcoholics Anonymous or AA was formed in 1935 when Bill W. one of the founders of AA decided that something needed to be done about alcoholism. In the short version, the way AA was formed was Bill W. was part of a group called the Oxford group. This was a Christian self-help group for men. They had come up with six steps to success in order to get your life together. Bill W. envisioned a group like this aiming specifically at alcoholics. He took the six steps and added six more and eventually AA was born.

For years and years, AA was the main thing that would be suggested to people struggling with alcoholism. But AA stats are not the greatest when it comes to recovering addicts. One thing that should be noted is it is very hard to gather statistics on this as the group is anonymous and does not do surveys of any kind.

Some studies have shown that AA is just as or even more effective than traditional therapies offered. Others show that many AA members relapse within the first year and many others in the first few years of their recovery. Neither has been shown to be more effective than the other. I think it comes down to the mentality and personality of the person trying to recover which leads them to one method of recovery or another.

It is estimated that there are over 2 million members in AA and over 115,000 groups worldwide. It has helped countless people around the world. But as the research and data suggest it is not for everybody. Many people use this as a tool to get sober and it works for them quite well. Then there are others where this approach to sobriety does not work for them.

Children are also strongly affected by the effects of alcohol on their parents. Many children see their parents at their worst points. Many children can't even bring their friends over out of fear that they will see one of their parents drunk and embarrass them. The family home is very unstable due to the drinking.

When is the proper time to tell children about their parent's drinking problem? Some say that this should be around the age children enter junior high. It is best the child knows about their parents drinking which in turn leads to an increased risk for the child to develop drinking problems later on in their life.

Some of these children also get abused emotionally and physically because of the effects of their parent's drinking. The effects of the things people have gone through stick with them throughout their years. There is even a support group specifically aimed at adult children of alcoholics.

So once you're able to gather the strength and courage to quit what exactly happens?

Some of the first signs of withdrawal can be things like an extreme craving for your substance of choice. Many people will also suffer from headaches and even their hands can be shaking uncontrollably. Then there is delirium tremens which can result in seizures and hallucinations and can last for 7 days or longer. If it is not treated it can cause death. It's estimated about 1-5% of alcoholics die from delirium tremens. Also when you quit serotonin levels in the brain drop leading to things like agitation. Dopamine levels also drop making it difficult to feel better.

Alcohol can affect all areas of the body. But the ones that are most commonly affected are the pancreas, liver, heart, brain and immune system. There are many health problems associated with drinking such as high

blood pressure, cirrhosis, alcoholic hepatitis and atrial fibrillation. It can also increase the risk of cancer, heart failure and stroke.

So how does one go about quitting drinking? I think the first thing that must be done is first admit you have a problem. This is step one of the Addicts Anonymous program. From there the next step should be going to a detoxification facility as alcohol withdrawal can be deadly. There you will be monitored as you detox from alcohol and if needed they can use certain medications to help prevent really bad withdrawal symptoms. I believe this to be the safest and most efficient way to go about doing this. In the end, this is believed to be a medical issue and should be treated as such.

It has also been shown that the next best and most effective route to take is to seek some form of professional help in addition to attending some type of support group like Alcoholics Anonymous. The combination of these two treatments has shown to be the best plan of attack in the fight against alcoholism. The two complement each other. One gives you insight into how your brain functions and affects the way you go about your daily life. It also can help in other ways as certain people in recovery might do better with the assistance of some type of medication. So you can get many benefits by getting in touch with some type of professional such as a licensed therapist, psychiatrist or psychologist. Then the support group of like-minded individuals lets you know that you are not alone in your battle against addiction.

If you are looking to truly get better and fight the battle against alcoholism you need to get honest with yourself. If you can't give yourself an honest self-assessment of what your life is truly like there is a very good chance you are not going to be successful. Step one of any 12-step program or the Addicts Anonymous 10-step program is to admit you have a problem, this is all about getting honest with yourself. This is something that must be done in order to progress along the path of sobriety. It is not an easy task by any means but it can be done.