

GUIDE TO
ALCOHOLISM

Understanding Alcoholism

While a glass of wine with dinner or a couple of beers while watching the big game may seem like a harmless way to unwind, for 14 million Americans, it is not possible to just have one or two drinks. Alcoholism, also known as alcohol dependence syndrome, is a disease characterized by an addiction to the consumption of liquor and alcoholic beverages. Alcohol is a central nervous system depressant. This means that it affects the body by slowing down central nervous system activity. Even in small doses, alcohol affects decision-making and reaction time. In moderate to large doses, alcohol can lead to severe impairment, leading to risky decision making and causing physical damage to an individual's liver and brain. Continued alcohol use and abuse increases the risk for health problems and an early death.

If you believe that a loved one is struggling with an addiction to alcohol, this information will help you better understand alcoholism and the steps you can take to help your loved one seek treatment for their dependency.



Who abuses alcohol?

Over **half of all adults (51.5%) aged 18 or older are regular drinkers**, consuming 12 or more drinks in the last year. Alcohol abuse is highest amongst non-Hispanic whites; 27 percent of non-Hispanic whites report abusing alcohol within the last year. Nineteen percent of Hispanics and 15 percent of African-Americans report abusing alcohol within the last year. The need for alcohol treatment is highest among 18 to 25 year olds, with 17.2% needing treatment. More men than women – 10.9% versus 4.8% – need treatment.

How is binge drinking related to alcoholism?

75 percent of all alcohol consumed in the United States is in the form of binge drinking. Individuals who binge drink are at greater risk for developing alcohol dependency and alcohol-related health problems. Binge drinking is a growing problem, especially amongst adolescents and college students. 90 percent of all alcohol consumed by youths under the age of 21 is in the form of binge drinking. However, not all binge drinking is limited to youth; 70 percent of binge drinking episodes involve adults aged 26 or older.



How does alcohol abuse affect society?

Alcohol abuse costs everyone. In 2006, excessive drinking, including binge drinking, cost the United States \$223.5 billion in lost productivity, increased crime and increased health care costs. Every day, nearly 30 people die in car crashes due to alcohol impairment. One in three crash deaths involves a drunk driver, resulting in more than 10,000 deaths each year. If a loved one is struggling with alcohol addiction, they struggle affects more than just their personal health, family and friends. By helping a loved one seek treatment for alcoholism, you not only are helping to save their life, but also potentially saving the lives of other Americans that would have been needlessly endangered.

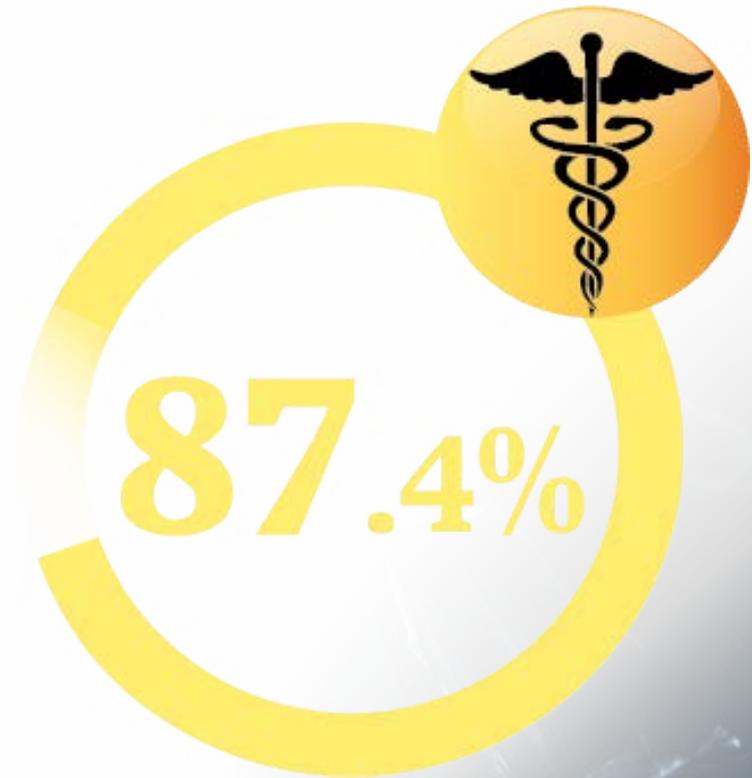
Is alcoholism genetic?

Recent research suggests that certain individuals may be predisposed towards alcoholism and alcohol abuse. For example, alcoholism often appears to run in certain families; individuals whose parents or siblings abuse alcohol are at increased risk for developing their own problems with alcohol. According to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, multiple genes play a role in determining whether someone develops alcohol problems. However, these genes only account for about half of the risk for alcoholism; environmental factors, along with the interaction between genes and the environment, account for the other portion of an individual's risk. While genetics certainly affect an individual's risk for alcohol abuse, genes are only part of the puzzle.



Treatment for Alcoholism

In 2007, 19.3 million Americans needed treatment for alcohol dependency. However, not everyone who needs treatment receives it. Sadly, the vast majority of individuals who need treatment for alcoholism – **87.4%** – **did not receive help because they did not believe that they needed it.** If a loved in is struggling with alcoholism, your decision to help them seek treatment is critical to their health and long-term sobriety.



What are the treatment options for alcoholism?

Alcohol rehabilitation centers are one of the most popular and effective treatment options for alcoholism. Inpatient rehab centers are especially beneficial for individuals who need time away from the pressures of daily life, such as work stress or a difficult family situation, which may be contributing to their alcohol abuse. Additionally, in-patient centers provide individuals with a “clean break” from the habits, people and places that fueled their alcohol abuse. In addition to inpatient rehab centers, other treatment options include outpatient care and Alcoholics Anonymous meetings.

What is the goal of alcohol treatment?

Long-term abstinence is the goal of alcohol treatment. In order to achieve this goal, most treatment programs focus on smaller, sequential steps. The first step is detoxification, which may require medical intervention in order to manage withdrawal symptoms. Following long-term abuse, withdrawal symptoms from alcohol can be severe. They include shaking, hallucinations and confusion. For patient safety, detoxification typically occurs at a hospital or inpatient treatment center. Subsequent steps include establishing a treatment plan, undergoing psychological counseling and group therapy to address issues contributing to alcohol abuse, and participating in an outpatient treatment program to help reduce the risk for relapse. These different milestones help individuals reach the overall goal of long-term sobriety.



How does Alcoholics Anonymous work?

Alcoholics Anonymous is a fellowship of alcoholics that helps individuals acknowledge their alcoholic addiction and take positive steps to support a sober life. There are no dues or membership fees to be part of Alcoholics Anonymous; the only requirement is a desire to stop drinking. With local groups in thousands of communities, many individuals who complete an inpatient rehab program join their local AA group as part of their commitment to sobriety. AA membership is composed of individuals who have discovered and admitted that they cannot control their alcohol consumption. AA members acknowledge alcoholism is an illness that can never be cured, but, by abstaining from alcohol consumption, it can be controlled. AA members follow the “24 hour” plan. This means that rather than pledging to avoid drinking forever, members focus on their sobriety on day at a time. AA is closely associated with the 12-step program as well as the belief that no one can “force” another person to stop drinking; the individual who is abusing alcohol must make that decision for themselves.

When is treatment at a residential facility necessary?

While some individuals may be able to successfully address their alcohol dependence with outpatient care and group therapy, for many other individuals, treatment at a residential inpatient program is necessary to kick-start their journey to sobriety. For a serious alcohol problem, treatment at a residential facility is very beneficial. In addition to providing an important “break” from an individual’s past life of alcohol abuse, treatment facilities also help integrate individuals into group therapy, Alcoholics Anonymous, activity therapy, and educational programs. Residential facilities help individuals establish new patterns of behavior that support an alcohol-free lifestyle.

How to Achieve Long-term Sobriety from Alcohol

Is rehab necessary for sobriety?

Alcohol addiction is a complex disease; individuals who abuse alcohol cannot simply “stop” after a certain number of drinks; it is the first drink that is the cause for an individual’s drinking problems and begins their downward spiral. However, it can be very difficult for individuals to admit that they are unable to control their drinking. Inpatient rehab centers help individuals break free from patterns of behavior and social interactions that fueled their drinking, giving them a fresh, sober start. While not everyone must attend a rehab program in order to become sober, many individuals find that the decision to attend this program marked their “turning point” and was critical to their long-term sobriety.

How can I help a loved one seek treatment?

Many individuals who struggle with alcohol abuse fail to seek treatment because they do not recognize that they have a problem. If you believe a loved one is abusing alcohol, an intervention followed by counseling or inpatient rehab, depending on the severity of their abuse, can help your loved one get healthy. Individuals who are addicted cannot simply “cut back” on consumption. An intervention from loved ones can help an individual recognize that they are addicted to alcohol and need professional help to stop drinking. However, it is important to remember that no one can “force” another person to get help. You may create opportunities for your loved one to seek treatment, but they must decide for themselves to stay sober.



What if my loved one resumes drinking after completing rehab?

Alcoholism, like any addictive condition, can be extremely difficult to overcome. Many famous celebrities, such as comedian Robin Williams, have “beaten” their addiction, only to find themselves drinking months or even years after first becoming sober. If your loved one resumes drinking, he or she may simply not be ready to quit. As frustrating as that can be, at the end of the day, no one can “force” someone to stop drinking; that decision must come from within. Individuals drink for a variety of reasons. Everything from bad personal relationships, a past history of physical or sexual abuse, depression, anxiety, or even boredom can be a trigger for drinking. A rehab center is best equipped to treat your loved one and help them understand what causes their drinking and how to better address these feelings and prevent future drinking. If your loved one suffers a relapse, they may need a longer stay at an inpatient facility to fully understand the ramifications of their addiction to alcohol and re-start their journey back to sobriety. With proper care, however, sobriety is possible.



75%

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in the form of
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