

Alcohol abuse and treatment: nwhic (excerpt)

[Health & Medicine](#), [Alcoholism](#)



Alcohol Abuse and Treatment: NWHIC (Excerpt) Alcoholism, also known as alcohol dependence, is a disease. Alcoholism is a chronic, often progressive disease with symptoms that include a strong need to drink despite negative consequences, such as serious job, relationships, or health problems. Like many other diseases, it has a generally predictable course, has recognized symptoms, and is influenced by both genetic and environmental factors that are being increasingly well defined. (Source: excerpt from Alcohol Abuse and Treatment: NWHIC) Physical Effects of Alcoholism There are many physical effects of alcoholism. You are probably aware of the effects that occur when a person has been drinking a lot. Their speech may be slurred, their gait may be crooked, they may become disoriented or confused. Their reaction time slows and they become uncoordinated, making it unsafe for them to drive. They may experience digestive upsets such as abdominal pain, nausea, and vomiting. They may even experience " blackouts, " in which they don't remember things they said or did while intoxicated. The physical effects of drinking may carry on into the next day when the drinker may experience a hangover. They may be nauseous or have a headache. They may be groggy and feel generally unwell. Alcoholics often miss work or are late to work due to hangovers. But the physical effects of alcoholism go beyond these immediate effects. There are long term health problems associated with alcoholism. Health problems associated with alcohol use include hyperglycemia, high blood pressure, heart problems, kidney disease, liver disease, pancreatitis, and increased risk for certain cancers. Some of these physical problems can be potentially deadly, such as cirrhosis of the liver. And again, alcoholics will continue drinking even when they have these

health problems and they know that drinking is making them worse, because they can't control their drinking. Psychological Effects of Alcohol Abuse One of the most notable psychological effects of alcohol abuse is depression. Alcohol is a depressant, and while many alcoholics drink in order to "self-medicate" for depression, alcohol really only makes depression worse. The depressant effect of alcohol can be felt right away, but it is also a long-term effect of alcohol use. Alcohol use can also cause feelings of guilt and remorse, particularly in chronic drinkers who know they shouldn't drink but can't help themselves. It may cause anxiety in drinkers who know they have health problems that are worsening due to their drinking. Alcoholics may become irritable or angry when confronted about their drinking. Alcoholics typically do not know how to deal with their emotions, and often use drinking as a way of coping with difficult feelings. Unfortunately, as you can see, drinking often creates more difficult feelings. Alcoholism may exacerbate any existing psychological problems, as well, such as anxiety disorders, depression, bipolar disorder (manic depression), anorexia or bulimia, or other mental health problems. These problems can be very serious when not under control. Mixing alcohol with medication for mental health disorders can also be very dangerous. Treatment for Alcohol Abuse Successful treatment must address all of the effects of alcohol abuse, both the physical effects of alcoholism and the psychological effects. The best treatment programs employ medical doctors to assess for and address any health problems related to alcohol abuse along with counselors to treat the psychological problems related to the condition. If the physical problems are not addressed, the alcoholic will not be able to focus on the psychological issues.

If the psychological issues are not addressed, the alcoholic will likely begin drinking again. Therefore a holistic approach that takes the whole person into account is the most successful treatment model.

Signs and Symptoms

What causes a person to become an alcoholic? Research suggests genetics and family history create a predisposition to the disease. There are also factors that increase vulnerability such as the existence of an alcoholic parent, childhood conduct disorder, anti-social behavior, or a transforming life event. Even where a person resides and the area's cultural views on alcohol can play a role in the onset of the disease. Alcohol abuse or dependence may not be readily apparent -- or even a concern -- to someone with a drinking problem. However, recognizing alcoholism signs and symptoms is a critical first step in fighting the disease.

Alcoholism Signs and Symptoms

Some signs of alcoholism include:

- Cravings:** Drinking may become an irresistible need and fill almost every thought throughout the drinker's day.
- Loss of Control:** The alcoholic may be unable to control the driving compulsion to drink.
- Physical Dependence:** The body and brain of an alcoholic become dependent on the drug's effect. Without a drink, the alcoholic may experience withdrawal symptoms such as anxiety, irritability, nausea, and tremors. In severe cases, seizures may result.
- Increasing Tolerance:** Over time, the alcoholic will need more and more alcohol to achieve the same results.