

# The aversive effect of alcohol



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Betty Ford, the wife of former President Gerald Ford, suffered from alcoholism and was addicted to painkillers. She raised public awareness of addiction by confessing her longtime battle with alcoholism in the 1970s. When she recovered, she established the Betty Ford Center to help others overcome substance and alcohol abuse. Perhaps Ford's greatest legacy was the honesty she brought to the American idea of alcoholism. Alcohol addiction can happen to anyone. There are no stereotypical symptoms of alcoholism. Even being the first lady of the United States does not make you immune to alcoholism. Abuse and addiction are two major issues in America. It affects the mind and bodies of "users" in harsh ways. Substance abuse is a pattern of repeated drug or alcohol use that interferes with health, work, and social relationships. The road to addiction is a long and winding road. Alcohol deeply affects our mentality, the ability to think clearly, and the personality of the people that use it. Numerous treatment options are available to help achieve the goal of ending addiction.

Ethyl alcohol most commonly known as ethanol is the active ingredient in beer, wine, and liquor, also colloquially known as alcohol. The process known as fermentation produces alcohol. When yeast is fermented, sugar breaks down into carbon dioxide and alcohol. Carbon dioxide exits the process through gas bubbles and leaves behind a combination of water and ethanol. Numerous factors can cause or lead to alcoholism.

High levels of stress cause a big impact mainly because people use alcohol to reduce their stress. Experimenting with alcohol at an early age can also

lead you to trouble in your later life. While drinking early on can increase the likelihood of alcohol abuse, alcoholism can affect any age group. Mental health issues can increase alcoholism. It is easy for a person feeling depressed or anxious to turn to alcohol, which to them, seems to ease their feelings, while in reality it makes things worse. Another factor that leads to alcoholism may be family history. If a parent or close relative is alcoholic, your risk increases. Part is due to genetics, but the other part has to do with the surrounding environment. Research has shown a close link with alcoholism and biological factors, mainly genetics and physiology. For some, alcohol gives off feelings of pleasure, encouraging the brain to repeat the behavior of drinking. Repetitive behavior causes a person to become more vulnerable. (Campus) While the road to addiction is different for every person, there are four common stages of addiction. The first being experimentation which is the voluntary use of a substance without experiencing any consequences. The experimenting usually occurs several times mainly because it is used for the purpose of “fun”. The second stage is regular use, which is when the risk for abuse increases and the start of risky behavior occurs. The third stage is known as the risky use or abuse stage. It is described as continued use of drugs or alcohol despite consequences. The beginning signs of addiction appear. The fourth and final stage is labeled drug addiction and dependency. Withdrawal symptoms occur and the compulsive use of the drug despite any consequences against relationships, physical or mental health, finances, and continuing work. (Palmera) Symptoms of alcoholism include blacking out, dizziness, aggression, compulsive behavior, anxiety, guilt, nausea, fear, problems with coordination, and slurred speech. (AshwoodRecovery) Frequent risk factors

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of alcohol use disorder are more than five drinks a day, parent with alcohol use disorder, mental health problems, peer pressure, low self-esteem, and high stress levels.

According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, addiction is a chronic, relapsing brain disease that is characterized by compulsive drug seeking and use despite harmful consequences. There is no simple cure for addiction. However, effective treatment can help you become and stay sober. Many treatment options are available for alcoholism. The main one being behavioral training, which is changing drinking behavior through counseling. Behavioral training consists of multiple types of therapies. Cognitive-behavioral therapy addresses harmful thought patterns, which helps clients recognize their ability to practice alternative ways of thinking, regulate distressing emotions and harmful behaviors. (AAC) Motivational enhancement therapy helps individuals resolve their ambivalence about their drug use. It aims to evoke rapid and internally motivated change rather than guide the patient through recovery. Motivational enhancement therapy consists of an initial assessment battery session, followed by two to four individual sessions with a therapist. (NIH)

Another type of treatment is holding brief interventions. Brief interventions are evidence-based practices designed to motivate individuals at risk of substance abuse and related health problems. It helps change their behavior by guiding them to understand how their abuse puts them at risk and how to reduce or give up their substance use. (SAMHSA) Alcohol and substance use disorders can severely undermine the foundation of healthy relationships. Spousal relationships often are the first to suffer when someone is struggling

with alcohol or drug dependence. Marital and family counseling is very common in these situations. Marital and family counseling is a type of psychotherapy that helps couples of all types recognize and resolve conflicts and improve their relationships. When your spouse is addicted to a substance, you have to deal with irrational behavior, them getting sick, lies, cheating and other unacceptable behaviors. The majority of the time it is extremely difficult for the non-addicted spouse for the fact that they are legally bound to the other person. (Dombeck) Two patient treatment options are available. Inpatient treatment programs require the patient to live at the facility for the duration, typically thirty, sixty, or ninety days of treatment. The process begins with detoxification. Withdrawal symptoms are managed in a safe environment by qualified medical staff. Outpatient treatment gives the patient more freedom to work and be home with you family. Though more freedom is granted, a person is at more risk for relapse. Lastly, the most common type of treatment for alcohol dependency is Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). Alcoholics Anonymous is a twelve step, nonprofit organization. It is an international mutual aid fellowship whose stated purpose is to enable its members to “ stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety”. AA was founded in 1935 by Bill Wilson and Bob Smith in Akron, Ohio. (AlcoholicsAnonymous) Being a member of Alcoholics Anonymous means listening to members share their experiences and to give service or sponsorship. Even though there are many treatment options for all individuals, people with a less serious addiction may attempt to diminish their addiction through everyday activities such as exercising, working out, running, going for walks, meditating, reading, volunteering, or finding a new hobby to take up your time. (AA) Most treatments work for the majority of

alcoholics, though some of the time, people may not be ready or able to begin or finish their treatment. There is no exact success rate given but a few common statistics are known. In 2015, only 4.4% of people twelve years and older, agreed to receive treatment for their addiction. Alcoholics Anonymous has more than 115,000 groups worldwide. 32% of those people were introduced by another group member and an additional 32% of people were recommended by a treatment facility. 59% of people who join Alcoholics Anonymous have already received prior treatment and 40% drop out of group within the first year. An article in the New York Times stated that around 75% of people who begin and finish a treatment plan stay abstinent throughout their lifetime. (AmericanAddictionCenters)

If alcohol is not consumed responsibly, there may be some serious consequences. Alcohol can permeate virtually every organ and tissue in the body, resulting in tissue injury and organ dysfunction. Evidence indicates that alcohol abuse results in clinical abnormalities of one of the body's most important systems, the endocrine system. The endocrine system ensures proper communication between various organs, also interfacing with the immune and nervous systems. The system is essential for maintaining a constant internal environment. Along with altering the endocrine system, alcohol also alters the levels of neurotransmitters which transmit behavioral, physical, activity, and emotion signals throughout the body. (Rachdaoui)

Addictive substances such as alcohol tend to overstimulate the brain's reward system by flooding it with excess levels of dopamine. The brain adjusts to the imbalance by reducing brain cells. Because of this, alcoholics could be at risk of dementia, stroke, depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts,

social problems, and many forms of cancer. Suicidal behavior is an extreme medical and social problem with alcoholics. Numerous amounts of evidence suggest that alcohol and drug abuse is associated with suicidal ideation, attempts, and suicides. After depression, alcoholism is the psychiatric condition most associated with suicide attempts and completed suicides. Alcohol and drugs are involved in around fifty percent of attempts. About twenty-five percent of completed suicides occur among individuals with alcoholism. (Vilens) A major study in 2017 by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, reported that the rate of female alcohol dependence in the United States increased drastically between 2002 and 2013. Experts suggest that the drastic rise stems from the high amount of anxiety and stress over balancing work and life situations. (Johnston) Today's youth seems to have an extremely difficult time dealing with alcohol and other substances. Alcohol is the most common drug choice among young people. Teenagers get hooked on alcohol just for the "fun of it". Alcohol slows down the brains of young people more quickly than the brains of legal age drinkers. It causes shrinkage in the brain causing numerous brain cells to die. Children's brains tend to develop much slower than the average adult because children of ages 12-18 have yet to learn many life and developmental skills.

Countless arguments have been discussed around of people questioning if some parts of consuming alcohol are good for you. Consuming alcohol, without a doubt, is a dangerous path to go on in general. People believe that if done responsibly, alcohol can add a few years onto your life. Although studies have shown that alcohol shortens your life by two or three years.

Another claim is that alcohol attacks cancer cells which is untrue. Drinking alcohol can increase the risk of developing cancer due to damages to the body tissue, improper absorption, and failure to produce estrogen. Lastly, another belief is that alcohol lowers cholesterol. Cholesterol is a waxy substance that is found in every substance of the body. Human bodies need cholesterol to produce hormones, vitamin D, and substances that help digest food. Although it is commonly known that irresponsible drinking does damage to the liver, cholesterol is mainly produced in the liver.

I had a conversation with a close family member of mine to learn more in depth of his struggles with alcoholism. “ I was addicted but did not need alcohol every day, most people do not believe that not needing your substance everyday can still be an addiction. I would start drinking on Fridays after work and typically not stop until around Sunday at midnight. The majority of the time I would drink until I would pass out. It would happen a couple times each day if I had nothing to do that day. Sometimes I woke up covered in vomit, then I would wash up, mix another drink and keep going no matter the time of day. It was such a terrible way to live, but I did not know how to stop. The way I quit was the best yet the worst way to quit. I went to jail and that was the longest time I had been without alcohol since I was eighteen. When I got out of jail, I was arranged to see a court ordered counselor for thirty-two hours’ worth of meetings. Through those meetings, I learned how real my problem was. I knew I needed to change things, or I would fall into the same drinking cycle. The friends I had were not real friends, they were alcoholics just like I was. We enabled each other, made each other think our behavior was normal. Now, being sober, I focus more on



what matters most. I try to spend more time with my family and work on my hobbies like hunting, fishing, camping, and working around the yard. Doing all these things helps me spend my time doing better and healthier things while not thinking about drinking. So, even if someone is an alcoholic, they can quit and overcome their substance abuse.”

Substance abuse is a continuous pattern of daily destruction to a person body. Abusing alcohol interferes with work, health, and relationships. A person’s road to addiction is long and winding and takes a toll on your mental health. Substances, like alcohol, deeply affects our mental health, the ability to think clearly, and the personality of the people that use it. Numerous treatment options are known and available to help a person overcome their lengthy battle with addiction.

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