

Introduction body.  
since alcohol has the  
potential to



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## **Introduction**

Alcoholism is a compulsive disorder due to the addictive effects it has on alcoholics.

It is a deteriorative disorder characterized by addiction, lack of self-control, distorted thinking, and tolerance to alcohol. Alcoholism claims 100, 000 lives annually and this is an alarming figure for the involved parties to ignore.

About 9% of adults in the United States are alcoholics while about 43% of adults are under a given stress related problem due to friends and family members who consume alcohol. Moreover, the cost of dealing with alcoholism is rising sharply compared to that of other killer causes like obesity and cancer. “ Alcoholism improves a drinker’s odds of developing cancer of the throat, larynx, liver, colon, kidneys, rectum, and esophagus ... it may also contribute to immune system irregularities, brain damage, harming an unborn baby, and cirrhosis of the liver” (Walker, 2004, p. 1). In spite of severe criticism, the American Medical Association classifies alcoholism as a disease because it affects the health of its consumers. The devastating health effects of alcohol prove that alcoholism is a disease and not a self will habit.

## **Physical Effects**

Alcoholism as a disease has serious physical effects to the body because it affects organs and systems such as the liver, the heart, and the nervous system amongst other critical organs in the body. Since alcohol has the potential to cause complication in the body system, liver is one of the crucial organs affected by alcohol because it functions in the metabolism of alcohol

in the body. Absorbed alcohol from the stomach immediately goes into the liver for further metabolism since liver is a detoxifying organ in the body. “ The amount of alcohol ingested, independent of the form in which it is ingested, is the most important risk factor for the development of alcoholic liver disease” (Robert & Arthur, 2010, p. 309).

Toxic nature of alcohol causes alcoholic liver diseases such as liver cirrhosis, alcohol hepatitis, alcohol fatty liver, and hepatomegaly. In this case, alcoholism is a disease that affects major functions of the liver because of the many complications associated with it. Alcoholism can cause complications in the heart that regulates all cardiovascular functions. Alcoholics have high risks of developing diseases such as cardiomyopathy, palpitations, dilations of the blood vessels and anemia. According to Robert and Arthur, “ alcoholism affects the pumping mechanism of the heart and slow down the rate of blood flow to the vital organs like lungs, heart and kidney” (2010, p. 312). Dilation of blood vessels and palpitations of the cardiac muscles cause cardiomyopathy that eventually leads to the heart attack or heart failure. Therefore, alcoholism is a disease that threatens proper functioning of the heart.

Consumption of alcohol also causes serious effects to the nervous system. The effects of alcoholism on the nervous system are evident as alcoholics show characteristics such as loss of memory, frequent seizures, tremor, peripheral neuropathy, insomnia, ataxia, hallucinations, and delirium among other neural disorders. Alcohol thickens neurons and slows transmissions of impulses between the central nervous system and peripheral nervous system, thus affecting the functioning of the brain. Robert and Arthur argue <https://assignbuster.com/introduction-body-since-alcohol-has-the-potential-to/>

that alcohol cause deficiency of vitamin B "...leading to impaired production of the enzymes needed for maintaining the covering of the nerve cells and this loss causes destruction of nerve cells which results in tingling and numbness, as well as muscle weakness" (2010, p. 313). For this reason, alcoholism paralyses the nervous system showing that it is a disease of the nervous system.

## **Predisposing Factors**

Individuals fall into the trap of alcoholism after predisposition by family members or friends who are alcoholics.

The continued exposure to alcohol or alcoholics results into psychological temptation to indulge in drinking alcohol and alcoholism as disease begins to develop. Alcoholism begins when an individual starts drinking alcohol occasionally for pleasure and continues into habitual drinking at certain time of the day or a given day of the week. Eventually, an individual becomes an addict with the habit of drinking alcohol regularly as compulsive drinking leads to the disease of alcoholism.

After becoming an alcoholic, an individual begins to lead a life of self-denial and loses control of his/her responsibilities at work place and in the family. " Psychologically isolated, the alcoholic addictively reaches for what he or she considers as friend and source of stabilization - alcohol. This convoluted progression continues to spiral downward and out of control, leaving emotional trauma and estrangement of relationships in its path" (Walker, 2004, . p.

7). Ultimately, alcoholism becomes a chronic disease that requires therapy for to recover fully. Comparative genetic studies show a significant genetic relationship within alcoholics groups than between alcoholics and non-alcoholics. Research implicates genetic makeup as a predisposing factor leading to alcoholism. In adoption studies, adopted children of the alcoholics showed significantly higher level of addiction as compared to the adopted children of the non-alcoholics.

In twin studies, “ monozygotic twins were approximately twice as likely to drink as dizygotic twins; among those who drank, monozygotic twins were more likely to have a similar frequency and quantity of alcohol consumption” (Walker, 2004, p. 11). Therefore, these studies affirm that genetic makeup of an individual is a predisposing factor to alcoholism. However, confounding studies have shown that genetic predisposition does not always lead to alcoholism and that many people who do not have genetic predisposition develop alcoholism. This means that everybody is at greater risk of developing alcoholism as a disease so long as there is alcohol exposure.

## **Treatment of Alcoholism**

Recovery from alcoholism disease is a gradual process that an individual undergoes during therapy. Alcoholics at first phase of recovery are in denial as they deny the fact that they suffer from alcoholism; therefore, it takes intervention from a psychotherapist to convince and advice them into admitting they have a problem that calls for an urgent solution. When alcoholics realize that they are suffering, they visit rehabilitation centers where they undergo preliminary assessments to determine the extent of their problem and negotiate about appropriate treatment plan. The initial <https://assignbuster.com/introduction-body-since-alcohol-has-the-potential-to/>

treatment given to the alcoholics is chemotherapy. Chemotherapy involves detoxification of the body to free all alcohol from the system and alleviate the disorders associated withdrawal syndrome. Next, the alcoholics go through a series of counseling and consumption of nutritional diet to help them recover from alcoholism. For complete recovery, family participation reinforces recovery as Kurtz argues that, " special group sessions are planned to help families communicate facts and feelings openly and honestly with support from other patients and their families" (2009, p.

20). This rehabilitation intervention enhances recovery from this societal thorn. Alcoholic Anonymous is a 12-step process, which has proved very effective in the recovery of alcoholics and has become an integral process in the treatment of alcoholism. The process has led to the formation of an international movement of Alcoholic Anonymous that advocates for the recovery of the alcoholics members. According to Kurtz, "...most members of Alcoholics Anonymous do speak of their alcoholism in terms of disease: the vocabulary of disease was from the beginning and still remains for most of them the best available for understanding and explaining their own experience" (2009, p. 2). The admission by the alcoholics that they are suffering from alcoholic disease is acknowledging that they need therapy. The 12-step process holds that the alcoholics are helpless in their condition of alcoholism and that if they believe and give their will to the supernatural power, then, they are going to recover.

The effectiveness of the 12-step of Alcoholic Anonymous emanates from acceptance of alcoholism as a problem and the inclusion of spiritual component to the therapy.

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## **Opposition**

Many critics argue that alcoholism is not a disease but a voluntary habit that an alcoholic nurtures through the lifespan. They argue based on alcohol drinkers who have the ability to control themselves on whether to take alcohol or not.

This argument is not valid; the fact that some drinkers suffer while some do not suffer does not mean that alcoholism is not a disease. “ Viewing alcoholism as a disease allows a professional group, namely to claim responsibility for its understanding and treatment and therefore affords the problem more exposure and respect” (Niedermayer, 1990, p. 4). Since alcoholism affects health, medical profession has a right to intervene in order to improve the health status of the alcoholics. The critics hold that alcohol is not a disease and its classification as disease lack scientific evidence.

For instance, “ people addicted to alcohol but do not show any prolonged and noticeable reduction in the person’s ability to function may have an addiction to ethanol, but are not considered alcoholics” (Niedermayer, 1990, p. 8). In this case, alcoholism becomes a disease when it causes adverse health effects to the drinker, otherwise normal drinking increases the risk of developing alcoholism. Although alcoholism seems to have blurred definition as a disease or a habit, the fact remains that it has serious health effects.

## **Conclusion**

Alcoholism is a disease that has adverse health effects to the alcoholics. The classification of the alcoholism as a disease has generated a raging debate in the psychological and medical fields. Alcoholism can be a habit; however, its

serious effects on the health of the alcoholics cannot justify this classification. Shocking statistical analysis shows that there is exponential increase in the prevalence of alcoholism in the United States of America signifying that the government should brace itself by expanding rehabilitation programs to meet the increasing demands.

The classification of alcoholism as a disease stands a better chance to receive great attention from the government and the medical profession in a bid to address the problem. Ultimately, the treatment of alcoholism lies in the hands of the medical profession. On the other hand, there is a dire need to create public awareness that alcoholism is a disease not a free choice that alcoholics make. It might appear as a choice at first; however, as addiction sets in, it robs the addicted of the free will to make choices.

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