

Alcaholism and physically

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Alcoholism is defined as a condition in which the individual is constantly preoccupied with the subject of alcohol, and consumes it to the level at which it affects physical health, mental health and functioning at the workplace, home or in social settings.

Two conditions related to alcoholism exist, namely, alcohol dependence and alcohol abuse. Alcohol dependence is a condition in which the individual tolerates alcohol (requires a high dose to get the same effect), depends on it psychologically and physically, and develops withdrawal symptoms when it alcohol is stopped.

Alcohol abuse is the misuse or maladaptive pattern of consuming alcohol to the extent that it interferes with interpersonal relationships, employment, legal affairs, health status, family life, social functioning, and financial status. Binge drinking is the consumption of 6 or more drinks at one time.

Almost half the number of deaths in US road traffic accidents is related to alcohol. About 18 million abusers of alcohol exist in the US (Mayo, 2006). In spite of this, people in the US continue to abuse alcohol, as the statistics are increasing.

About 15% of the US population has a problem with drinking. 5 to 10 % of the male drinkers are dependent on alcohol, whereas 3 to 5% of the female population is dependent on it (Ballas, P., 2007). A total of 12.5 million of the US population are dependent on alcohol. Men are 4 times more prone to develop alcoholism compared to females (Merck, 2003).

Alcoholism develops progressively, by altering the equilibrium of a chemical nerve transmitter present in the brain (GABA). The level of the

neurotransmitter dopamine also rises with alcohol, which is responsible for producing the enjoyable effects.

In alcohol addiction, certain chemicals present in the brain get depleted or even rise. The body tries to bring about good feeling and mask the negative feeling by developing the alcohol addiction (Mayo, 2006).

The exact cause of alcoholism is not known. Alcoholism is seen more often seen in children having parents with alcohol use disorders (Merck, 2003). Several mental factors such as mental stress, distress, depression, anxiety, low-self esteem, etc, may be associated with alcoholism.

Besides, several environmental (such as having a close partner who has a drinking problem), social (acceptance by the society), cultural (such as excessive alcohol advertisements) may also play a very important role in the development of alcoholism (Mayo, 2006).

Individual with alcoholism develop a number of symptoms and behavior patterns. They often enjoy drinking alone or give excuses for drinking. They require daily consumption of alcohol to function and tend to lose slowly control over drinking. They become aggressive when stopped or refused alcohol.

Relationships and functioning at home, school, social setting and at workplace are strained. They tend to become increasingly irritable when their daily time for drinking nears. Slowly they feel the need to drink more amounts of alcohol in order to obtain similar effects (Mayo, 2006).

Some individuals may develop withdrawal symptoms (such as rise in the heart rate, loss of appetite, nausea vomiting, confusions, hallucinations,

sleeplessness, aggressiveness, deliriums, seizures, shaking, sweating, and weakness) when they do not get to drink for about 12 to 48 hours (Ballas, P., 2007). Prolonged consumption of alcohol can damage the liver (causes alcoholic liver disease), heart (cardiomyopathy and stroke) and the brain (dementia) (Merck, 2003).

Usually people suffering from alcoholism do not understand that their habit is a serious problem not only for others but also for themselves. At first, alcohol should be completely stopped. Some individuals may develop symptoms of withdrawal and require medications to reduce them. Nutritional supplements may also be required.

An alcohol abstinence maintenance program is required in which counseling, education, mental support, nursing and medical care, are provided on an inpatient, outpatient or a consultative basis. Several medications (such as disulfiram, acamprosate, naltrexone and vivitrol) are administered to prevent relapses.

Several support organizations such as Alcoholics Anonymous helps alcoholics to stop consuming alcohol and resume a normal life (Ballas, P., 2007).

Many individuals suffering from alcoholism are involved in fatal road-traffic accidents. Some may even end their lives through suicide or in complications associated with the disorder. A small percentage of alcoholics in fact are administered medical treatment. Relapses seem to be frequent after treatment, but a good proportion of alcoholics who have undergone treatment are able to lead a positive life, if the will to do so exists (Ballas, P., 2007).