

ALCOHOLISM

What is it?

Alcoholism is a physical and mental dependence on alcohol which results in chronic disease and disrupts personal and work relationships. The cause is not fully understood but depends on personality factors like dependency, anger, mania, depression, introversion and family factors such as parental alcoholism or divorce. There are also many social and cultural pressures to drink. Some people are even thought to have a body chemistry imbalance which causes alcoholism. An alcoholic may also have inherited the tendency to abuse alcohol.

Signs and symptoms:

EARLY

- * Anxiety difficult to tolerate.
- * Crave alcohol at the day's beginning or to ease stress.
- * Insomnia.
- * Nightmares.
- * Frequent hangovers.
- * Frequent absences from work.
- * Preoccupation with alcohol; hide it from family and friends.
- * Irritation or guilt when others comment on excessive drinking.

LATE

- * Frequent blackouts and memory loss.
- * Delirium tremens (occurring most often with withdrawal) which is tremors, hallucinations, confusion, sweating and rapid heartbeat.
- * Cirrhosis of the liver which is a liver disease with symptoms of yellow eyes and skin.
- * Numbness and tingling of hands and feet.
- * Decreased libido.
- * Impotency.
- * Confusion.
- * Coma.
- * Congestive heart failure with shortness of breath, swollen hands and feet.

Treatment:

- * Short term care to stop drinking and possibly detoxification to help with withdrawal symptoms.
- * Long term help to deal with problems that lead to and were a result of the alcoholism.
- * Possible stay at treatment center.
- * Counseling.
- * Alcoholics Anonymous or other support groups; meetings must be attended regularly.
- * Avoid factors of lifestyle that encourage drinking.
- * A medication called Disulfiram or Antabuse may be prescribed to control drinking. When this drug is taken, any alcohol consumed will produce very unpleasant side effects.
- * Naltrexone is another drug that will decrease the pleasure that alcohol produces.
- * Other drugs may be used for the withdrawal symptoms that can occur. These include benzodiazepines, tranquilizers or anxiolytics, antipsychotics and anticonvulsants.
- * Do not drink and drive at any time.
- * Eat a good, well-balanced diet. Vitamins may be needed as alcoholism can cause dietary deficiencies.