

# Alcohol Addiction Signs, Symptoms and Effects

## What Are the Signs and Symptoms of Alcohol Abuse and Addiction?

Alcoholism is a serious medical disease with signs and symptoms that vary depending on the amount and frequency of consumption. Progressing alcoholism will significantly disrupt the lives of users and their families.

Physical signs of alcohol overconsumption and intoxication are recognizable by most adults:

- Slurred or incoherent speech
- Poor balance and clumsiness
- Delayed reflexes
- Stomach pains, vomiting or nausea
- Loss of consciousness or blacking-out
- Redness of the face during or after periods of consumption

It is possible for a person to reach a level of intoxication that becomes life-threatening (alcohol poisoning). The respiratory system becomes depressed, and the person will stop breathing.

## Signs of Alcohol Abuse

Progressive increases in the frequency and quantity of alcohol consumption can begin to produce more serious medical symptoms of alcoholism. Someone abusing alcohol makes drinking a central activity of her life, displacing healthy activity and relationships, and resulting in negative consequences. Alcohol abusers often maintain some capacity to recognize situations that lead to over-consumption, and to regulate their alcohol intake. Signs of alcohol abuse include:

- Loss of control over amount consumed once they begin drinking
- Regular inattention to family and professional obligations
- Dangerous behaviors that carry risk of legal, financial and/or health consequences for themselves and others
- Increase in expressions of anger or other emotions, especially in inappropriate settings
- Insomnia, which may be followed by oversleeping

## Signs of Alcohol Dependence (Alcoholism)

Untreated alcohol abuse can progress to an addiction to alcohol characterized by physical dependency and/or inability to stop despite serious consequences. Once they begin drinking, alcoholics have little to no control over the amount they consume. Alcohol dependence indicates that the user has made obtaining and consuming alcohol a predominant focus of her life. Signs and symptoms of alcohol dependence represent a serious medical illness:

- Significant hangovers, and increase in time needed to recover from after-effects of alcohol use
- Increased amount of alcohol consumed because of increased tolerance; or, decrease in the effects of alcohol use without substantial increases in the amount consumed
- Reduced attention to personal and professional responsibilities
- Acknowledgement of side effects of medical complications from alcoholism
- Repeated unsuccessful efforts to reduce alcohol consumption
- Withdrawal symptoms when unable to consume alcohol

## **Withdrawal Symptoms of Alcoholism**

Long-term alcohol abuse and addiction put the user at risk for serious medical consequences if they attempt to stop alcohol consumption without proper medical advice and supervision. Alcoholism withdrawal symptoms indicate advanced addictive disease, and should not be dismissed:

- Tremors, convulsions, or uncontrolled shaking of the hands (or even the entire body)
- Profuse sweating, even in cold conditions
- Extreme agitation or anxiety
- Persistent insomnia
- Nausea or vomiting
- Seizures
- Hallucinations

Alcohol detoxification is poses greater health risks than other drugs. A sudden discontinuation of alcohol consumption can often induce a condition known as delirium tremens. A person can die as a direct result of alcohol withdrawal. Generally, medical detoxification is needed to safely discontinue heavy drinking.

**The Timberline Knolls admissions team is here to help you. Call us: 877-257-9612**

## **What Are the Effects of Alcohol Abuse and Alcohol Addiction?**

Long-term alcohol abuse poses great dangers to an alcoholic's physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual health. In addition to serious ramifications for the user's career, family and friends, alcoholism can cause irreversible damage to critical organs and body systems:

- Liver
- Nervous system
- Heart
- Stomach (intestines)
- Brain

Alcohol abuse and addiction also produce other medical side effects. Alcoholics frequently attribute these complications to other health conditions, as they attempt to avoid ownership of the consequences of their drinking. Common medical side effects include:

- High blood pressure
- Sexual problems
- Cancer
- Stomach problems
- Osteoporosis, especially in women

Alcoholism often causes severe social consequences on a person's life as well. Being drunk or hung over at work frequently results in termination from a job, leaving a person and her dependents in severe financial trouble. Domestic violence, marital conflict, legal problems and isolation from friends and family are also common results of alcohol abuse, which may be worsened by the presence of co-occurring anorexia or bulimia.

## **How Does Alcohol Affect the Body?**

Alcohol acts as a depressant on the central nervous system. It has a complex mode of action and affects multiple systems in the brain. Most notably alcohol works by binding to GABA receptors in the brain and activating the release of the chief inhibitory neurotransmitter in the central nervous system. This aspect of alcohol's physiological effects is one reason alcohol detoxification can be dangerous (see below). Alcohol is metabolized by the liver. Long term consumption of alcohol in excessive amounts can cause irreversible damage to the liver.

Alcohol addiction, or alcoholism, is medically diagnosed as a disease which manifests itself in the frequent use of alcohol, despite the negative consequences it has on a person's life. Alcohol abuse causes over 100,000 deaths every year in the United States and Canada. It is the leading cause of death in teenagers due to alcohol related motor vehicle accidents.

It is often apparent that a person suffers from alcoholism when both their mental and physical health suffers as a direct result of their drinking. Drinking patterns are not the same for every alcoholic. While some people get drunk every day, others binge drink at specific times depending on their emotional state.

## **What Causes Alcoholism?**

Although scientists cannot pinpoint specific reasons why alcoholism develops, they have identified several contributing factors. Genetic predisposition, environment, and mental health are the leading risk factors for developing this disease. These factors explain why members of a family with similar life experiences may respond to alcohol consumption in different ways. Even in families where alcohol abuse and addiction are prevalent, different members may respond very differently to treatment and face unique challenges in recovery.