

ALCOHOLISM

Alcoholism is defined as a psychological and physiological dependence on alcohol, resulting in chronic disease and disruption of interpersonal, family and work relationships. It affects both sexes, but occurs more often in men than women. Rough estimates indicate that one in 50 of the US population is alcohol dependent. The incidence of alcoholism in children is increasing. Sadly, college drinking binges resulting in death seem to be on the rise.

Signs and symptoms in the early stages of alcoholism include increased tolerance to the effects of alcohol, low tolerance for anxiety, need for alcohol at the beginning of the day, or at times of stress, insomnia, nightmares, habitual Monday-morning hangovers, and frequent absences from work, preoccupation with obtaining alcohol and hiding drinking from family and friends, guilt or irritability when others suggest drinking is excessive.

In the later stages frequent blackouts, memory loss, depression, tremors, hallucinations, confusion, sweating, rapid heartbeat (delirium tremens) are common. These occur most often with alcohol withdrawal. Liver disease with jaundice, internal bleeding, and bloating are often sequelae. Neurological impairment with numbness and tingling in hands and feet, declining sexual interest, confusion, coma and death due to liver failure are usual. Congestive heart failure from alcoholic cardiomyopathy is a common occurrence, as is pancreatitis and both mental and physical damage to the fetus.

The causes of alcoholism are legion and include personality factors, dependency, anger, mania, depression, introversion, alcoholic or divorced parents, social and cultural pressures, and, at times, abnormal metabolism of alcohol.. The risk of alcoholism increases with genetic factors, use of recreational drugs, crisis situations, immaturity, and environmental stresses.

Preventive measures include using safe limits of alcohol intake as recommended by medical authorities: drink slowly; never gulp alcoholic drinks; do not drink on an empty stomach; do not drink to relieve stress, anxiety, tension or depression. Seek counseling early. Provide children with a loving, stable family environment. Be a healthy role model. Encourage a spouse, friend or co-worker to admit when an alcohol problem exists, and seek professional care.

General treatment measures include the recognition of the existence of the problem, and be willing to fight it. Psychological, social and physical treatment may be combined. Sometimes inpatient care at a special treatment is required. A local Alcoholics Anonymous or other support group is often very helpful. Medications may be prescribed by your physician, and a well-balanced diet with vitamin supplements are often necessary.

We at the Health Center will be happy to help you .



Healthfully yours,

Dr. Healthberry

For questions or comments you can;

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