

## Understanding Alcoholism and Alcohol Abuse

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The terms alcoholism and alcohol abuse are in fact two different stages of alcohol addiction.

Alcoholism involves an uncontrollable physical need and emotional dependence on alcohol. Even when all aspects of the drinker's life have been adversely affected, the drinker cannot stay away from alcohol. Alcoholism is a chronic disease that can progress even to the point of death if left untreated.

Alcohol abuse is a less severe stage of drinking than alcoholism. The alcohol abuser may still drink excessively and even suffer from health and social consequences, but never entirely loses their control over alcohol as would the true alcoholic.

While not always easy to identify the true alcoholic, there are signs that can be recognized. Not everyone suffering from alcoholism experiences all of these symptoms. Because they are likely to be secretive about it, it can be difficult to ascertain in another.

Here's what to watch for:

1. Keeping drinking secret from friends and family; drinking alone a lot; hiding the alcohol in odd places.
2. The inability to stop drinking once started.
3. Have full or partial "blackouts," where the memory of events while drinking isn't complete.
4. Becoming annoyed when a regular drinking ritual, like having a drink after dinner, is interrupted.
5. Leaving behind past hobbies and pleasurable activities.
6. Drinking becomes a compulsion or a necessity.
7. The more time without a drink, bad temper and irritability is displayed.
8. Gulping strong drinks to reach the drunk feeling as rapidly as possible.

9. Tolerance levels are reached making it necessary to drink even larger amounts to attain the needed feeling.

10. Relationships, work, financial troubles increase, sometimes involving legal actions.

11. When no alcohol has been consumed for a while for whatever reason, experiencing symptoms of physical withdrawal - shaking, sweating, and nausea.

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