



Understanding the Nature of Alcoholism and Addiction

By

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When a person is addicted to alcohol or drugs, they begin to have a lot of problems that are caused by the addiction. For example, when an addict is actively using they may become depressed, anxious, suicidal, explosive, and unpredictable. They may appear to be bipolar or complain of having numerous health problems, including chronic pain. For most addicts, these problems go away when they quit drinking or doing drugs. Their mental, physical, and relationship problems are, thus, caused by the addiction. Remove the substances and the other issues often miraculously get better.

Many people mistakenly believe that Chemical Dependency is simply a flaw in a person's character or a failure of "will power". They think that if a person just tried harder, they would be able to control their drinking or drug use. While it is true that many people are able to drink in moderation, alcoholics (or drug addicts) cannot. To understand why, it is helpful to understand the Disease Concept of Addiction.

Addiction is a Disease

The American Medical Association and the American Society of Addiction Medicine classify addiction as a disease because it is a chronic, progressive, and, if left untreated, fatal illness.

Chemical Dependency is Chronic – Once a person has become addicted to alcohol or drugs, they will always be an addict. There is no going back to occasional using. It is almost like their brain develops an allergy to the alcohol or drugs. The moment they use, they want more.

For an addict, one drink is too many and one hundred is not enough.

Chemical Dependency is Progressive - If left untreated, Chemical Dependency gets worse over time. Alcoholics and Addicts don't "grow out of it" or "go through a phase" of using drugs. The disease of addiction progresses something like this:

Stage 1 - Live and Use

Stage 2 - Use and Live

Stage 3 - Live to use

Stage 4 - Use to live

Chemical Dependency is Fatal – Because Chemical Dependency is progressive and chronic, if left untreated, it does lead to death. Death may come quickly via a motor vehicle accident or slowly as the body wears down.

Addiction Can Occur at Any Age

Some people become addicted the first time they drink or do any drugs, while others may use substances for years before crossing the line into addiction. The important point to remember is that once a person crosses the line into addiction, the solution is sobriety and abstinence.

Addiction Is An Equal Opportunity Destroyer

Many people think that you can't be an alcoholic or addict if you still have money and a job and you haven't had any significant legal problems. Many people also mistakenly believe that if you aren't physically addicted and have withdrawal symptoms then you can't be addicted. Unfortunately, addiction can happen to anyone, regardless of their background, social status, finances, or career. Just because you haven't lost everything, doesn't

mean that addiction isn't affecting your life. In fact, for most alcoholics or addicts, the last thing that they tend to lose is their job.

Relationships are Often the First Casualty of Addiction

Relationships are often the first thing to suffer when addiction occurs. As the alcohol or drugs become more prominent, relationships become less important. An addict may spend more and more time either getting high, recovering from the last high, or preparing for the next high. As a result, they spend less meaningful time with spouses, kids, parents, or friends. Arguments begin to replace communication. As a result, intimacy often becomes the first casualty of addiction.

Risk Factors Associated with Addiction

Approximately 10% of the population struggles with addiction. Some of the risk factors for addiction include:

- Genetic predisposition.
- Having parents who have addiction issues.
- Growing up in a chaotic environment.
- Growing up in an environment where alcohol and drug abuse is highly prevalent.
- Lack of parental involvement.
- Inadequate coping skills.
- Tendency toward self-medication.

New Dimensions Can Help If You or Someone You Know Is:

- Depressed or Suicidal
- Stuck and having difficulty making changes
- Dealing with trauma
- Struggling with Panic Attacks
- Having difficulty working or going to school
- Struggling with addictions or substance abuse
- Cutting or doing other self-destructive behaviors
- Struggling with anger issues
- Struggling to get medications stabilized

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Dual Diagnosis Issues

Some people struggle with both mental health and substance abuse issues. As a result, they may need to address both issues in order to successfully maintain sobriety. For example, a person with bipolar disorder may try to self-medicate and begin to abuse drugs or alcohol in an attempt to manage their mood swings. Without stabilizing their mood they may find it very difficult to become sober. In these circumstances, it may be necessary for the individual to have medications that help stabilize their mood. With the correct medications, the need for self-medication diminishes and the ability to create and maintain a life of sobriety becomes more attainable.



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20 Signs That You May Be an Addict

- Do you have a hard time picturing your life without alcohol or drugs?
- Do you yearn to return to the “good old days” of being able to party without worrying about consequences?
- Do you keep telling yourself that you will be able to control the amount you drink this time, only to fail again?
- Do you drink more than the people around you?
- Are you the last one still partying at the end of the night?
- Do you hide alcohol around the house?
- Do you think about drinking or doing drugs when you aren’t high?
- Do you start looking forward to your next binge?
- Do you try to get others to keep drinking or doing drugs so that you aren’t the “only one” still partying?
- Do you drink alone or plan for times where you can drink or do drugs alone?
- Once you start drinking, is it hard to stop?
- Do other people complain about your drinking or drug use?
- Do you try to avoid people that don’t support your partying?
- Do you lie to others about whether you have had a drink or done any drugs?
- Are most of your friends alcoholics or addicts?
- Have you lost relationships because of your alcohol or drug use?
- Have you spent an entire day recovering from a binge?
- Do you get in arguments with your loved ones when you are drinking or doing drugs? Do the arguments ever get out of control?
- Is drinking or doing drugs your primary hobby?
- Have you ever been arrested or had legal problems because of your alcohol or drug use?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, then maybe it is time to take an honest assessment of yourself and your own alcohol or drug usage.

Understanding the Thinking of Alcoholics and Addicts

Denial and the Insanity of Alcoholism

The insanity of addiction is that no matter how much evidence is presented, an alcoholic and addict will continue to deny that their usage is a problem.

While addicts frequently lie in order to cover up the extent of their usage, denial enables them to completely evade the addiction moniker which allows them to continue in their behavior.

For example, an addict might continue to deny that alcohol is a problem, even after their family falls apart. They, instead, might blame everyone else in the family for not “understanding” them. They might claim that their “mood swings” are caused by everyone else’s actions and if everyone else would just quit “nagging” them, then everything would be great. Another example, is an alcoholic blaming a DWI on “bad luck” instead of

admitting that their drinking is out of control.

Alcoholics Have Distorted Perceptions

To the outside observer, an alcoholic’s or addict’s denial seems crazy. No matter how many times they are confronted with the reality of the impact of their addiction, they deny that it is a problem. They are able to do this because their perceptions become distorted. They begin to really believe that their problems are being caused by others around them. They frequently see themselves as the victim and so their feelings of hurt and anger are justified.

Alcoholics Become Impatient

Addicts learn that they can change their feelings instantly just by getting high. As a result, they begin to focus on getting instant relief, instead of dealing

with the problems around them. A common feeling for alcoholics and addicts is “I want what I want when I want it.”

Alcoholics Become Self-Centered and Feel Entitled

The more a person sinks into addiction, the more self-centered and entitled they tend to feel. They begin to believe that they deserve more and more of what they want and that anything that stands in their way is a problem.

Alcoholics Become Manipulative

Addicts manipulate those around them in order to get what they want. They can often be very charming and engaging and will often tell people around them exactly what they want to hear. For example, an alcoholic might promise to give up drinking in order to keep their spouse

from leaving. They might appear very sincere, even though they know that they have hidden alcohol around the house and intend to drink in the near future.

Alcoholics Struggle with Feelings of Shame

Buried deep beneath the denial is often a feeling of shame. On some level, addicts know that their usage is out of control, but their disease keeps them from admitting it. They, instead, blame others for their problems. The more shame they feel, the more they blame others which causes things to feel more out of control. This creates an endless of loop of more shame followed by more blame.

Remember that treatment can break this cycle and bring a person back from the insanity of addiction.