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WHAT IS ALCOHOLISM?

Alcoholism or Alcohol Dependence, is a chronic disease marked by a craving for alcohol. People who suffer from this illness are known as alcoholics. They cannot control their drinking even when it becomes the underlying cause of serious harm, including medical disorders, marital difficulties, job loss, or automobile crashes.

Medical science has yet to identify the exact cause of alcoholism, but research suggests that genetic, psychological, and social factors influence its development. Alcoholism cannot be cured yet, but various treatment options can help an alcoholic avoid drinking and regain a healthy life.

Alcohol dependence develops differently in each individual. Alcoholics develop a craving, or a strong urge, to drink despite awareness that drinking is creating problems in their lives.

They suffer from impaired control, an inability to stop drinking once they have begun. Alcoholics also become physically dependent on alcohol. When they stop drinking after a period of heavy alcohol use, they suffer unpleasant physical ailments, known as withdrawal symptoms, that can include nausea, sweating, shakiness, and anxiety.

Alcoholics develop a greater tolerance for alcohol- that is, they need to drink increasing amounts of alcohol to reach intoxication.

DEPENDANCE

Statistics show that alcohol dependence touches successful business executives, skilled mechanics, laborers, homemakers, and church members of all denominations. Nearly 62 million people worldwide suffer from alcohol dependence. The prevalence of the illness varies in different countries. In the United States nearly 15 million people experience problems related to their use of alcohol.

In the United States, people who start to drink at an early age are at particular risk for developing alcohol dependence. Estimates indicate that 40 percent of people who begin to drink before age 15 will become alcohol dependent at some point in their lives. These individuals are four times more likely to become alcohol dependent than those who delay drinking until age 21.

PHYSICAL EFFECTS OF ALCOHOL

Ethyl alcohol, or ethanol, is present in varying amounts in beers and wines, and in distilled liquors such as whiskey, gin, and rum.

When a person consumes alcohol, the stomach and intestines rapidly absorb it. From there alcohol travels in the blood throughout the entire body, affecting nearly every tissue.

Moderate and high doses of alcohol depress the functions of the central nervous system, including the brain.

The higher the alcohol level is in the blood, the greater the impairment.

PERCENT OF ALCOHOL IN BLOODSTREAM EXPANDS.

As blood passes through the liver, enzymes break down alcohol into harmless byproducts, which are eliminated from the body six to eight hours later.

But the rate at which alcohol accumulates in the body may be faster than the rate at which the body eliminates it, resulting in rising alcohol levels in the blood.

Consequently, alcohol remains in the body, producing intoxicating effects hours after the last drink was swallowed.

Small amounts of alcohol may relieve tension or fatigue, increase appetite, or produce an anesthetic affect that numbs pain. Larger quantities inhibit or depress higher thought processes, bolstering self-confidence and reducing inhibition, anxiety, and guilt.

As a person becomes intoxicated, painful or embarrassing situations appear less threatening and, as drinking progresses, speech may become loud and slurred.

Impaired judgment may lead to incautious behavior, and physical reflexes and muscular coordination may become noticeably affected.

If drinking continues, complete loss of physical control follows, ending in stupor, and possibly death.

SOCIAL EFFECTS OF ALCOHOLISM

Throughout most of history, society has viewed people who drink to excess as irresponsible, immoral, and of weak character.

Punishment of drunkards was considered necessary to protect the community. By the early 1900s, experts conceded that alcohol dependence may result from tissue changes caused by the action of alcohol.

These changes produce a continued need to drink, such that the individual seeks larger amounts of alcohol at more frequent intervals.

However, society still regarded taking or rejecting a drink as a matter of personal decision, thus all excessive drinking was considered a voluntary act. The individual, therefore, was held responsible for his or her behavior.

Today experts characterize alcohol-use disorders as a form of illness, and one so widespread that it constitutes a major public health problem.

Alcohol dependence and other alcohol-use disorders undermine global health, accounting for 3.5 percent of the total cases of disease worldwide.

This figure equals the hazards posed by unsafe sex and surpasses two other formidable health foes, tobacco and illicit drugs.

In the United States alone, the NIAAA estimates that alcoholism causes losses of more than \$185 billion a year in lost productivity, illness, and premature death.

DEVELOPMENT OF ALCOHOL DEPENDANCE

Alcohol-use disorders develop in a predictable pattern. Health professionals use three stages to describe this progression.

Each stage is defined by a set of symptoms that are used in early diagnosis and treatment. Most individuals who drink alcohol never progress beyond stage one and are commonly known as social drinkers.

A small percentage of social drinkers progress to stage two. In this early stage of a drinking problem, many people do not show any signs of illness.

But often, more severe problems develop with time and continued heavy drinking.

Activities that focus on drinking may take up increasingly larger amounts of time in the person's life, and as problem drinking progresses the alcoholic's intoxicated behavior may become disagreeable and antisocial.

A person may resort to drinking to relieve the physical discomfort of withdrawal symptoms. Most often, attempts to avoid the discomfort result in morning drinking to offset symptoms that develop after a bout of drinking the night before.

As drinking continues, drinkers cannot acknowledge that drinking and intoxication have become goals in themselves.

Drinking may become a technique for coping with problems, many of which have been brought about by alcohol use.

Drinkers may neglect responsibilities to their family, seriously damaging relationships with their partners and children.

Their productivity at work declines, often resulting in job loss. Despite numerous negative consequences experienced as a result of their drinking, they remain in denial about their problem. They continue to claim to friends or family that they can stop drinking any time they want to. But in actuality they find it increasingly difficult to control their alcohol use.

Stage three is the final stage of alcohol dependence. In addition to suffering from many of the problems experienced by individuals in stage two, an individual in stage three can no longer control his or her drinking.

This impaired control, in which the compulsion to drink is overwhelming, is the key identifier that health professionals use to diagnose people who have progressed to alcohol dependence.

PHYSIOLOGICAL CONDITION OF DENIAL

Many drinkers develop a psychological condition known as denial, in which they are unable to acknowledge that alcohol use lies at the root of many of their problems.

Denial was long thought to be a personality trait shared by all persons who suffer from alcohol-use disorders.

Recent research suggests that denial may be a psychological response to negative feedback people receive about their drinking.

Some studies indicate that when approached with objective information about their drinking and its consequences in an empathetic and non confrontational manner, many persons with significant drinking problems do not demonstrate denial.

If you feel that you fit this profile, there are several Organizations that you can resort to.

On the web:

<http://www.alcoholic-anonymous.org/> - Online program

<http://www.ncadd.org/programs/index.html> - Online Program

<http://www.adultchildren.org/Meetings.s> - Adult Children of Alcoholics World Service Organization

<http://www.aa-intergroup.org/> - Online Intergroup of Alcoholics Anonymous

<http://www.stayingcyber.org/> - Alcoholics Anonymous meetings

NEW MEXICO LOCAL PHONE NUMBERS

Alcoholics, Problem Drinkers, Family Members or Friends of Alcoholics.

HELP is Available FREE !

Meet healthy People Overcoming similar problems!

100 AA Meetings / Week in Santa Fe County_____ 982-8932
NA 2 Meetings / Day in Santa Fe_____ 984-2098
CRAFT Program for Families_____ 473-0099

THE LIFE LINK_____ 438-0010
Both Mental Health and Substance Abuse Counseling Services (Santa Fe)

AYUDANTES Inc._____ 438-0038
Substance Abuse Treatment Services (Santa Fe)

St. VINCENT HOSPITAL_____ 820-5276
Substance Abuse Treatment Services (Santa Fe)

RECOVERY OF ALCOHOLICS PROGRAM (RAP)_____ 471-4985
Substance Abuse Treatment Services (In Santa Fe)

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS_____ 266-1900
Albuquerque and surrounding areas

FAMILIES' ANONYMOUS_____ 262-2177

CASAA_____ 768-0100
Center for Alcoholism, Substance Abuse and Addictions

DIVINE HOPE_____ 831-0961
Christian-Based Support Group for Substance Abusers

ALL INDIAN PUEBLO COUNCIL Inc._____ 884-3820
Substance Abuse Treatment Service

ALBUQUERQUE HEALTHCARE OF THE HOMELESS_____ 766-5197
Both Mental and Substance Abuse Services

COUNSELING AND PSYCHOTHERAPY_____ 243-2223
Both Mental and Substance Abuse Services

MEMORIAL PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL_____ 247-0220
Both Mental and Substance Abuse Services

ALIVIAR COUNSELING SERVICES_____ 247-4622
Substance Abuse Treatment Services

UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO MILAGRO PROGRAM_____ 272-6906
Substance Abuse Treatment (Methadone/LAAM)

UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO CENTER ON ALCOHOLISM
SUBSTANCE _____ 768-0100
Substance Abuse and Treatment Services

WESTERN CLINICAL HEALTH SERVICES_____ 262-1538
Substance Abuse Treatment Services

HOGARES Inc. _____ 345-8471
Substance Abuse Treatment

FIRST NATION COMMUNITY _____ 2622481
Substance Abuse and Treatment Services

VETERANS SUBSTANCE ABUSE PROGRAM _____ 2651711 ext. 5381
Substance Abuse and Treatment Services

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT Inc. _____ 884-9411
Substance Abuse Treatment

PATHWAY Inc. _____ 265-9811
Substance Abuse Treatment

LOVELACE PARK CENTER _____ 342-8400 ext. 8409
Mental Health and Substance Abuse Treatment

KASEMAN PRESBYTERIAN _____ 291-2555
Mental Health an Substance Abuse Treatment

NEW MEXICO MONITORED TRATMENT PROGRAM _____ 271-0800
Substance Abuse Treatment Services

TURQUOISE LODGE _____ 841-8978
Substance Abuse Treatment Services

PUEBLO OF ISLETA BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES _____ 865-3254
Substance Abuse Treatment Services

LA BUENA VIDA Inc. _____ 867-2383
Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (In Bernalillo)

VALENCIA COUNSELING SERVICES _____ 865-3350
Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (In Los Lunas)

FIVE SANDOVAL INDIAN PUEBLO BEHAVIOURAL HEALTH SERVICES
PROGRAM _____ 867-
3351

Substance Abuse Treatment Services (In Bernalillo)

SAN FELIPE BEHAVIOURAL HEALTH SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND PREVENTION PROGRAM _____ 867-9740

Mental Health Substance Abuse Treatment Services (In San Felipe)

SANTO DOMINGO SUBSTANCE ABUSE PROGRAM _____ 465-2733
Mental Health and Substance Abuse Treatment Services (In Santo Domingo)

BEHAVIOURAL SERVICES OF ACOMA _____ 552-6663
Substance Abuse Treatment Services (In Acoma)

LOS ALAMOS FAMILY COUNCIL _____ 662-3264
Mental Health Services (Los Alamos)

VALENCIA COUNSELING SERVICES _____ 287-7985
Mental and Substance Abuse Services (In Grants)

THE HOY RECOVERING PROGRAM INC. _____ 753-2203
Substance Abuse Treatment Services (In Espanola)

AYUDANTES Inc. _____ 747-0102
Substance Abuse Treatment Services (In Socorro)

DELANCEY STREET NM Inc. _____ 852-4291
Substance Abuse Treatment Services (In San Juan Pueblo)

SOCORRO MENTAL HEALTH FOUNDATION _____ 835-2444
Mental Health Services

EIGHT NORTHERN INDIAN PUEBLOS COUNCIL _____ 852-2788
Substance Abuse Treatment Services (In San Juan Pueblo)

ALAMO ALCOHOLISM PROGRAM _____ 854-2626 ext. 115
Substance Abuse Treatment Services (In Magdalena)