

# ***A Brief Guide to Understanding Alcoholism and Drug Addiction***



## ***Introduction***

One of the most heartbreaking things you can experience is watching a loved one's life slowly become ruined due to the devastating effects of alcoholism or drug addiction. Most likely you feel inadequate to help the person. And you may be understandably scared for the person's health and safety (as well as the safety of others around him) if he continues down this path of self-destruction.

It can be maddening, frustrating, and gut-wrenching to deal with the person. And while you may feel very alone in trying to understand and cope with an addict, you are definitely not alone...

## ***Some Brief Statistics...***

***When it comes to alcohol and drug problems here in the U.S.,  
the statistics are staggering....***

- Over 4 out of every 10 adults in the U.S. are related to someone who is, or was, an alcoholic (1)
- In the U.S., nearly 14 million individuals are alcohol-dependent (1); some research indicates nearly 20 million people have an addiction to alcohol and / or drugs (3).
- At least 6.6 million U.S. children (age 17 or younger) live with an alcoholic parent (1)
- In 2005, well over \$200 billion was spent on alcohol abuse or addiction (1)
- When it comes to addictions to drugs or other substances, nearly 5 out of every 10 people in the U.S. have a loved one struggling with a drug problem (2)
- Roughly 4 out of every 5 crimes in the U.S. are associated with alcoholism or drug addiction (4).
- For those over the age of 60, approximately 3 million are either alcoholics or abuse alcohol (1).

(3) <http://transformationstreatment.com>



Needless to say, those are mind-boggling numbers which clearly indicate just how significant the problems of alcoholism and drug addiction are in the U.S. However, if you or someone you love has a drug or alcohol problem, statistics probably don't really matter to you; what does matter is that your life is being affected – possibly torn apart – by an insidious problem over which you most likely feel powerless. And that is a very painful and frightening place to be.

The good news is there is hope. It may not feel like it right now as you read these words, but please be aware that alcoholism and drug addiction, as powerful and ugly as they can be, do not have to control and ultimately destroy a person's life. Every day thousands of adults successfully become clean and sober, going on to live happy and productive lives. Your loved one (or you) can too.

Hundreds, if not thousands, of books have been written on alcoholism alone; many more have been written on drug abuse and addiction. These topics are complex and involved, and to cover them thoroughly goes far beyond the scope of this eBook. So here we will cover the basics for you, to give you a general understanding of alcoholism and addiction and what can be done about them.

***Just two notes:***

*for the sake of this eBook, the issue will be addressed for the person who is concerned about a loved one rather than for someone who is seeking help for himself - but all the information still applies just the same. And, only for the sake of avoiding awkward wording, male pronouns (such as he, him, his, etc) will be used throughout.*

***A Closer Look at Alcoholism & Addiction***

To begin, it helps to have a little understanding with regards to what alcoholism and drug addiction actually are - how they affect a person both physically and psychologically; why someone may become addicted; behaviors to look for, and so on.

# *Alcoholism and Addiction are not always obvious...*



## **Just What is an Addiction?**

For someone who has never struggled with an addiction, it can be both frustrating and baffling to understand why an alcoholic or addict does the things he does. You wonder why he can't just stop. It makes no sense (from your perspective) as to why he continues drinking or using even though it is destroying his finances, his relationships, his health and / or his job. In fact, you may have tried confronting him only to feel you are beating your head against a wall. Needless to say, significant conflicts between couples and within families occur every single day due to this issue. And as many eventually realize, it is a futile battle.

Alcoholism and addiction are not merely bad habits which a person can discontinue at any given time. In fact, one of the hallmarks of dependency on a substance is that the person usually does desire to stop and has tried to stop or cut back, only to realize that it is not something he can control. Sadly, this often creates the vicious circle in which the person feels guilty and ashamed that he can't stop, and quickly reaches for the substance as a way to alleviate or numb those painful feelings.

While many people picture an addict or alcoholic as someone who can't keep a job, who is always dependent on others, or who has lost everything and is living on the street, that is often not the case. There are many addicts and alcoholics who are very high functioning. They may be highly educated and hold prestigious jobs. They are especially adept at hiding their addiction and giving the appearance that everything is fine.

Some can live like this for many years without anyone (or, if married, sometimes only their spouse) realizing they are addicted. It is not uncommon for people in high-powered (and thus high-pressured) careers to struggle with alcoholism or drug addiction. Sadly, their condition often goes undiagnosed, and because they are so good at fooling others, their own denial is perpetuated and they never get treatment.



## Indicators of Addiction (also known as Dependence)

Whether it is alcohol or another substance, there are several key indicators that indicate when a person has become addicted to or dependent upon a substance. These are:

- Tolerance – the need to use more and more of the substance in order to get high, intoxicated, or achieve the desired effect
- Craving – a very powerful urge or need to use or drink
- Inability to control use – the person can't stop using or drinking even though he wants to and tries to
- Withdrawal symptoms – when the alcohol or substance isn't used for a period of time (often because the person can't access it for one reason or another), he experiences symptoms of withdrawal which vary in nature depending on the substance
- Time spent – the person spends a lot of time doing things to obtain the substance (e.g., going to lots of doctors to get more pain pills; also, the person may spend a of time recovering from using the substance
- Continued use despite the problems it causes – the person doesn't stop even though he is aware that his use is adversely affecting his work, health, family life, social life or finances

When someone becomes addicted to (or dependent on) alcohol or drugs, it has taken on a life of its own. Dependence goes far beyond recreational use of a substance, although many addictions start as such. As you can see from the above list, when a person has become dependent on a substance such as alcohol or street drugs, they have begun to use or drink more heavily and more frequently. This typically happens because they have developed a tolerance for the substance; they need more to get high.

Another reason the person uses or drinks more and more is because the cravings have become so intense. In fact, it becomes difficult for him to distinguish between the desire to use, and the need to use. Over time, he needs the alcohol or drug to ward off withdrawal symptoms, which begin to occur when he is without the substance for a certain amount of time.

## ***Drugs can affect normal brain function...***



While not all substances lead to physiological dependence, the ones which do can cause some very uncomfortable, if not downright dangerous, withdrawal symptoms. When those start to occur, an addict will do just about anything to get a hold of the substance to stop the withdrawal. Perhaps you have heard someone say they are “jonesing for a fix”...that is a common slang term referring to the need for a drug, usually when someone is starting to experience withdrawal symptoms.

### ***Is Addiction a Disease?***

While many professionals who treat addictions and particularly alcoholism abide by the disease model, there is still a lot of controversy regarding this concept. Not all treatment programs and healthcare professionals agree with the disease model of dependency.

#### ***There are two primary schools of thought:***

- 1.** Alcoholism and drug addiction are diseases. Alcoholism in particular tends to run in families, but many studies have also shown that addictive behavior in general seems to have a hereditary component. In fact, there has been some research which suggests the possibility of an “addictive gene”, although thus far no particular gene has been found to fully substantiate this. One popular theory is that it is a combination of genes which makes a person predisposed to becoming addicted to alcohol, drugs or other substances.

Those who support the disease model point to the fact that alcoholism and drug addiction are similar to other medical conditions in that the environment as well as the person’s behavior play a role in their onset and course, and they respond to certain types of treatment. Also, they argue, and justifiably so in most cases, that the person does not have control over their alcoholism or addiction.



2. Alcoholism and drug addiction are habits or choices. The person turns to the substance as a way to cope. He may become emotionally or physically dependent on it, but that doesn't make it a "disease". Those who support this model argue that by stating it is a disease, it takes too much, if not all, responsibility off the addict or alcoholic.

One of the problems with this model is that if addiction or alcoholism was merely a choice or habit, due to a "weakness", then people who were motivated to quit would be able to do so much more readily. But even highly determined individuals have a difficult time becoming clean and sober based on sheer will power alone.

With regards to drug addiction in particular, more and more research is providing evidence that it affects and alters the normal functioning of the brain over time. An addict not only obtains intense pleasure from the drug, but struggles with intense cravings which can be incredibly difficult, and often impossible, to resist. The addictive behavior becomes compulsive and professional treatment is usually required in order to put an end to it. This, of course, lends support to the belief that an addiction is an illness.

One of the advantages to the disease model for dependency is that it removes the idea that it is a "moral" or "psychological" problem. There is already plenty of shame that accompanies substance dependence of any kind. The person usually has many feelings of self-contempt, whether he shows it or not.

Shame tends to feed the need for denial, which makes it that much harder for the alcoholic or addict to acknowledge the severity of the problem. By regarding it as a disease or illness, he is much more likely to be receptive to treatment and stop regarding himself as a weak person who merely lacks self-control.

Regardless to which school of thought one subscribes, the reality is that drugs and alcohol can create a powerful dependency in an individual, which makes it extremely difficult, and often impossible, for the person to just stop using or drinking without some form of treatment, not to mention a lot of support.

# ***What factors cause someone to become dependent on alcohol or drugs?***



No one can predict who will become addicted to alcohol or drugs, and each person is different. However, there are certain known risk factors which play a role. The more of these risks present, the greater the chance of becoming an alcoholic or drug addict.

## ***Availability and exposure***

When a substance is readily available, easy to obtain, and the person is exposed to it frequently, he is more likely to use that particular substance than another substance. For example, bartenders and waiters have a higher risk of abusing or becoming addicted to alcohol because of their work environment. During the Vietnam War heroin was readily available to soldiers, and an unusually high percentage of them became addicted to it.

## ***Social factors***

Peer pressure is a powerful factor when it comes to using drugs or alcohol, particularly for teens. A significant percentage of alcoholics and drug addicts first began using in their teen years.

## ***Personality***

While anyone can become an addict or alcoholic, some personality types are at higher risk. Some research suggests that personality plays a more significant role as a risk factor for drug addiction than alcoholism. Also, children with difficult temperaments who are also impulsive and hostile are at greater risk for developing an addiction.

## ***Psychiatric Disorders***

Individuals with various types of mental health disorders have a higher risk of alcohol and drug abuse or addiction. Many people with anxiety disorders, depression, bipolar disorder and ADHD, for example, use substances to self-medicate their symptoms or cope with their pain. Often it is not until the person becomes clean and sober that the underlying psychiatric disorder is diagnosed. Also, there is a strong link between the various personality disorders, particularly antisocial or borderline personality disorders, and alcohol and drug addiction. Unfortunately, alcohol and drug use usually exacerbate any psychiatric disorder. This is why a prudent medical or mental health professional will rule out substance use as the cause of symptoms before making a definitive psychiatric diagnosis.



### ***Symptom Relief***

Many people who become dependent on drugs or alcohol often do so in an attempt to alleviate physical pain or other distressing symptoms, such as loneliness, shyness or even boredom. While some do so with street drugs or alcohol, others end up addicted to prescription medications such as benzodiazepines (typically used for anxiety or sometimes for insomnia) or pain medications which can cause physiological dependency with prolonged use.

### ***Heredity***

If there is a family history of alcoholism or drug addiction, there is an increased risk. While the role of genetics is still unclear, many studies have shown, for example, that the child of an alcoholic is much more likely to become one than a child who does not have an alcoholic parent.

### ***Childhood environment***

Children who grow up in a deprived home environment have an increased risk of developing an addiction to drugs (more so than alcohol). Surveys have shown that a high percentage of alcohol abusers grew up in a home without a father.

### ***Type of substance***

The type of substance a person starts using can impact the degree of risk in terms of addiction. Not all substances have the capacity for physiological dependence. The ones that do, like alcohol and heroin, are much more likely to lead to an addiction because the person needs to keep using the substance in order to ward off withdrawal symptoms once he's become physically addicted.

### ***Speed of effect***

Substances which quickly affect a person are more likely to be abused (and thus become an addiction) than their slower-acting counterparts. With alcohol, for example, high proof types such as gin and vodka are much more likely to lead to dependence than more diluted, lower proof beverages such as beer or wine. Many street drugs are very fast acting and lead to a high incidence of addiction.

# Some Common Drugs of Abuse and Addiction



There are many different drugs and substances to which a person may become addicted; far more than can be covered specifically in this brief eBook. Here we will look at some of the most common drugs. Keep in mind that not all drug addicts are addicted to illegal or “street” drugs. There are many people who are addicted to prescription medications, as well as substances like certain types of inhalants which they easily purchase at a store.

## ***Polydrug addiction***

Also, while most addicts have experimented with and abused a variety of drugs over time, some addicts have only one particular drug or type of drug to which they are addicted. That being said, there are also many addicts who have a “polydrug” addiction, which means they are addicted to more than one type of drug. Also, some people have an addiction to one or more drugs as well as alcohol.

## ***Amphetamines and Methamphetamines***

Amphetamines, including methamphetamines and related drugs (such as methylphenidate) are a type of stimulant, and are often referred to as “speed”. They work by stimulating the central nervous system and can create a pleasurable, heightened feeling of well-being or “euphoria”.

- **Prescription forms or related forms:** Dexedrine, Ritalin, Adderal, Cylert; primarily prescribed for narcolepsy and ADHD, although at times for weight loss, depression, and chronic fatigue.
- **Non-RX forms:** Methamphetamines or crystal meth
- **Street names:** uppers, black beauties, speed, glass, eye openers, bennies, crank, lid poppers, truck drivers, ice, pep pills, crystal; (for Ritalin) Skippy and vitamin R
- **How they are used:** Smoked, swallowed, injected or snorted
- **Types:** Tablets, capsules, powders, crystals, liquids, chunks
- **Effects include but not limited to:** increased energy, heightened alertness, agitation, insomnia, fast or irregular heart beat, irritability, talkativeness, hallucinations, paranoia, panic, aggressive and / or violent behavior, impulsivity, tremors, decreased appetite, weight loss, increased metabolism, memory problems or memory loss. For people with ADD or ADHD, they have a calming, rather than stimulating, effect.
- **Withdrawal symptoms:** Anxiety and / or depression; tiredness; problems sleeping or oversleeping
- **Warning signs of amphetamine abuse or addiction:** Paranoia, confusion, problems sleeping, excitability, frequent lying or secretiveness, compulsive need to get more stimulants; dilated pupils, violent or aggressive behavior, weight loss, rotting teeth, picking at one’s skin, neglect of appearance



## ***Cannabis***

Cannabis refers to marijuana, hashish, and hash oil. This drug is made from the leaves and tops of a type of hemp plant called *cannabis sativa*. They contain a chemical substance called THC, which affects mood, behavior and thought processes. THC can remain in the fat cells of your body up to several weeks.

- **Forms:** Marijuana, Hashish or Hash, Hash oil, Sinsemilla
- **Street names:** Weed, Mary Jane (MJ), pot, joint, reefer, grass, bud, doobie, dope, skunk, ganga, gangster, boom, chronic
- **How it is used:** smoked with a bong or rolled with cigarette rolling papers; hash can be eaten when baked into foods
- **Effects include but not limited to:** relaxed feeling, decreased inhibitions, talkative, anxiety, panic, paranoia, having the “munchies”, sleepiness, red eyes, dry mouth, possible hallucinations, impaired judgment, problems with coordination, problems thinking, lack of motivation, memory problems, difficulties tracking time
- **Withdrawal symptoms:** flu-like symptoms, cravings for marijuana, irritability, anger, restlessness, decreased appetite, headaches, depressed mood
- **Warning signs of cannabis abuse or addiction:** bloodshot eyes, giggly or silliness, dizziness, problems with coordinated movements such as walking; difficulties recalling recent events; paranoia; frequent sleepiness; frequently increased appetite or “munchies”

## ***Cocaine***

Cocaine is a stimulant with many effects similar to amphetamines. It comes from the leaves of the coca bush, and most cocaine comes from Colombia.

- **Forms:** Cocaine, crack cocaine
- **Street names:** (for cocaine) coke, blow, C, snow, flake, powder; (for crack cocaine) rock, bings, Bebe, French fry, smoke, crackers
- **How they are used:** snorted, injected, smoked, or taken orally
- **Types:** crystal, powder, granules, freebase, crack cocaine
- **Effects include but not limited to:** feelings of euphoria, increased energy, talkative, decreased appetite, decreased need for sleep, increased mental alertness, feelings of confident, paranoia, hallucinations, panic attacks, dilated pupils, increased heart rate, irritability, anxiety, bizarre or violent behavior, heart and respiratory problems
- **Withdrawal symptoms:** intense cravings for more cocaine, anxiety and irritability, difficulties feeling pleasure, agitation, paranoia, fatigue and sleepiness, restlessness, depression, vivid bad dreams
- **Warning signs of cocaine abuse or addiction:** frequent nosebleeds or runny nose, loss of smell, hoarseness, tracks – usually on the forearms, significant weight loss.

# Heroin, Pain Medications, and other Opioids



Opioids are drugs which have an analgesic affect and thus relieve pain. The majority of these are medications prescribed for pain but can easily lead to addiction. Heroin, the primary street drug in this category, is made from morphine and is extremely addictive.

- **Prescription forms:** Codeine (such as Tylenol 3), hydrocodone such as Vicodin), Hydromorphone (Dilaudid), Oxycodone (such as Percoset, Oxycontin), Methadone, Morphine, Demerol, Fentanyl, Darvocet
- **Non-RX forms:** Heroin
- **Street names:** (for heroin) smack, H, big H, Miss Emma, Harry, black tar, junk, lady, brown sugar; (for morphine) morf, cube, white stuff, pectoral syrup; (oxycodone) hillybilly heroin, ox, ocs; (fentanyl) China girl, China white; (oxycontin) 40, kicker
- **How they are used:** swallowed, injected, smoked, inhaled or snorted
- **Types:** pills, liquid, powder, tar-like substance
- **Effects include but not limited to:** pain reduction, depression, sedation, euphoria, cloudy thinking, heaviness in arms and legs, slurred and slowed speech
- **Withdrawal symptoms:** muscle aches, agitation, sweating, insomnia, anxiety, stomach cramps, nausea and vomiting, diarrhea, pupil dilation
- **Warning signs of heroin or opiate abuse or addiction:** in addition to the above effects: tracks, abscesses, collapsed veins, multiple health issues

## ***Sedatives, Hypnotics and Anxiolytics***

Drugs which fall into this category include sleeping pills and tranquilizers, as well as anti-anxiety medications. They also comprise half of the top ten drugs abused in the U.S. They work by slowing down or depressing the body's functions. When they are misused or taken in high doses, they can be fatal. Drugs in this category are some of the most abused drugs in the U.S.

- **Prescription forms:** Benzodiazepines (such as Xanax, Valium, Librium, Klonopin, Ativan), barbiturates such as Amytal and Seconal, and other drugs such as Quaalude and Noctec (chloral hydrate). Rohypnol is also a benzodiazepine, but is illegal in the U.S.
- **Street names:** barbs, downers, benzos, candy, moggies, Vals, tranks, Xanies; for Rohypnol: the date rape drug, Roofie, Mexican Valium
- **How they are used:** swallowed or injected
- **Types:** pills, capsules, tablets



- **Effects include but not limited to:** feelings of calm, relaxation, drowsiness; mood swings, extreme fatigue,
- **Withdrawal symptoms:** insomnia, anxiety, restlessness, seizures, and potential death
- **Warning signs of abuse or addiction:** slurred speech, slow reflexes, memory problems, poor judgment, problems with coordination, insomnia, aggression,

### ***Hallucinogens***

Hallucinogens are also known as psychedelic drugs. They primarily affect one's perceptions by significantly distorting them and causing hallucinations. These drugs are not generally considered addictive, although tolerance can develop and some people do develop an emotional dependence, in that they feel they must have the drug.

- **Forms:** LSD, Peyote, Psilocybin, PCP, Ecstasy (MDMA)
- **Street names:** for LSD: acid, Bart Simpsons, L, Liquid A, sugar, sunshine, tabs, heavenly blue; for PCP: angel, angel dust, love boat, zombie; for Psilocybin: magic mushrooms; for Ecstasy: E, love drug, the club drug, Adam
- **How they are used:** eaten or swallowed, injected, smoked, snorted
- **Types:** tablets, capsules, liquid, fresh or dried mushrooms, buttons (peyote)
- **Effects include but not limited to:** hallucinations, fast and intense emotional swings, terror, panic, delusions, alterations in sense of self and time, flashbacks, impaired memory, violent or suicidal tendencies (PCP)
- **Withdrawal symptoms:** none
- **Warning signs of hallucinogen abuse:** signs of any of the above effects, dilated pupils, bizarre behavior

### ***Inhalants and Solvents***

Inhalants and solvents are often used to get "high", particularly by adolescents and children. Their effects are experienced very quickly because the lungs absorb them once inhaled, and from there they go directly into the bloodstream and on to the brain. They are common products which are often found right at home; if not, they can be purchased in most stores. They primarily include four types: nitrites, volatile solvents, aerosols, and gases. They are extremely dangerous and can cause brain damage and death.

- **Forms:** Nitrous oxide or "laughing gas", gasoline, various types of glues, aerosols, paint thinner, cooking spray, rubber cement, shoe polish, typing correction fluid, nail polish remover, waxing products, various cleaning products, whipped cream, shaving cream.
- **Street names:** Huff, sniff, poppers, snappers, Oz, bullet, buzz bombs, poor man's pot, climax, rush, whippets, bolt, air blast, highball, hippie crack, moon gas.

## *Steroid use is on the rise...*



- **How they are used:** inhaled or sniffed, mixed with liquids and swallowed, or sprayed directly into the mouth
- **Types:** aerosols, gases, solvents, nitrites
- **Effects include but not limited to:** relaxation, feeling “high”, excited or euphoric, hallucinations, feeling light-headed, impaired judgment, lowered inhibition, recklessness, increased pain threshold, dizziness, problems with coordination, coughing and sneezing, bloodshot eyes, sensitivity to light, blurred vision, depression, staggering
- **Withdrawal symptoms:** rapid heart beat, insomnia, nausea and vomiting, anxiety, agitation, sweating, tremors, headaches, hallucination, seizures, paranoia, loss of appetite, delirium, potential death
- **Warning signs of abuse or addiction:** glassy eyes, breath smells like chemicals, clothing or body has stains or paint on them, appetite loss, slurred speech, irritable or easily excited, changes in mood or behavior, watery or red eyes, runny or red nose, sores or rashes around the mouth

### **Anabolic Steroids**

Anabolic steroids (not to be confused with corticosteroids which are prescribed for health conditions such as asthma or lupus) are typically used to increase muscle mass or to become better at sports. They are synthetic and work similarly to male sex hormones. Unfortunately, steroid abuse has some very dangerous side effects and has been on the rise in recent years.

- **Forms:** DHEA, Dianabol, Anadrol, to name a few
- **Street names:** roids, juice
- **How they are used:** swallowed, injected, or rubbed into skin
- **Types:** pills, liquid, creams, gels
- **Effects include but not limited to:** increase in muscle size, aggression, sense of invincibility, erratic behavior, muscle aches, mania, delusions, paranoia, trembling, acne, hot flashes, depression, as well as gender-specific effects such as shrinking testicles, breast development and lowered sperm count in males; lowered voice, facial hair, decrease in breast size, menstrual cessation, male-pattern baldness in females,
- **Withdrawal symptoms:** aggression and violent behavior, suicidal behavior, mood swings, depressed mood, significant decrease in strength and size
- **Warning signs of abuse or addiction:** extreme mood swings, increase in acne, stretch marks and highly oily skin, poor judgment, feeling invincible, jealousy, paranoia, intense irritability



## ***Telltale Behaviors and Signs of a Drug Addict***

Now that you have some idea what an addiction is, the different factors which may play a role in becoming an addict or an alcoholic, and some information about common drugs of choice as well as the effects of alcohol and many common drugs, it may be helpful to know what to look for if you suspect someone has a serious drug problem.

Keep in mind that some behaviors are associated with certain drugs and not others, but the following list will give you a good basis of what to look for, as there are many common behaviors regardless of one's drug of choice. These behaviors should be both a change from previous functioning, and have no identifiable cause (e.g. a major life stress such as the death of a loved one; a health issue, etc).

- Changes in personality or attitude
- Changes in eating habits or appetite
- Weight loss or weight gain
- Starts missing work or is late more frequently
- Changes in performance at work
- Changes in or begins neglecting personal hygiene
- Loses interest in family
- Changes in normal habits
- Starts associating with drug users; spends less time with non-drug using friends
- Forgetfulness or poor concentration
- Becomes more talkative or hyperactive
- Loss of interest in activities, people or things that used to be important to him
- Decreased motivation; has less energy; more apathetic
- Needs more and more money; borrowing from friends or family; stealing to get money
- Mood swings, anxiety, irritability
- Seems suspicious or paranoid
- Becomes more secretive and private; engages in suspicious behaviors
- Aggressive or violent behavior
- Bizarre behavior
- Becomes increasingly defensive or resentful
- Begins accumulating drug paraphernalia
- Bruises or needle marks on forearms, feet or legs; tries to hide arms, legs or feet
- Inappropriately silly or giddy
- Starts getting in trouble with the law; lies about behavior
- Becomes more accident prone at home, work or while driving
- His body, breath or clothing smells like the drug he is using

# ***Alcohol is a unique type of drug...***



## ***Alcohol Addiction***

While in some ways alcohol is another type of “drug”, it is really in a category of its own. Not only is alcohol use socially acceptable and readily available, it is completely legal in the U.S. for individuals of “legal age” which varies slightly from state to state. Also, for teens but also for many adults, there is often significant peer pressure to drink in many social situations. Unfortunately, the rate of alcohol abuse and addiction is very high in the U.S. Alcohol abuse and addiction are the cause of many serious health issues, violent acts, child abuse, domestic violence, and death.

When alcohol is consumed, the stomach absorbs it and from there it goes into the bloodstream. There are many factors which determine how much it will effect a person, including the person’s age, weight, tolerance to alcohol, and how recently and how much they have eaten. Also, alcohol affects different people in different ways. For example, while one person may become outgoing and silly when they drink, another person may become irritable and moody or depressed. Yet others become aggressive or even violent when they drink.

One of the primary effects of alcohol is that it is disinhibiting. In other words, when a person drinks, he is far more likely to do things he would not normally do. This is one of the reasons why people who are more introverted or shy may drink just prior to as well as in social situations. Alcohol allows them to “loosen up” and feel more comfortable and sociable. Unfortunately, this effect of alcohol is also what gets many people into trouble when they drink, as they do things which they later regret.

While many people drink alcohol thinking it will give them a “boost”, it is actually a depressant. It slows down the brain and nervous system. It also has been shown to lower brain chemicals like serotonin and norepinephrine, which contribute to a sense of well-being. As a result, alcohol use can cause depression or make existing depression even worse.

### ***Effects of alcohol include but are not limited to:***

*Impaired judgment, disinhibition, laughing inappropriately, loud speech, problems with coordination, staggering, increased talkativeness, depressed or sad mood, dizziness, slurred speech, glassy eyes, problems sleeping, nausea and vomiting, aggression, confusion, flushed skin, double vision, impaired memory, lethargy, coma and possible death.*



### ***Warning signs of alcohol abuse or addiction:***

While there is a very long list of potential indicators of alcohol abuse and addiction, following are some of the more common ones:

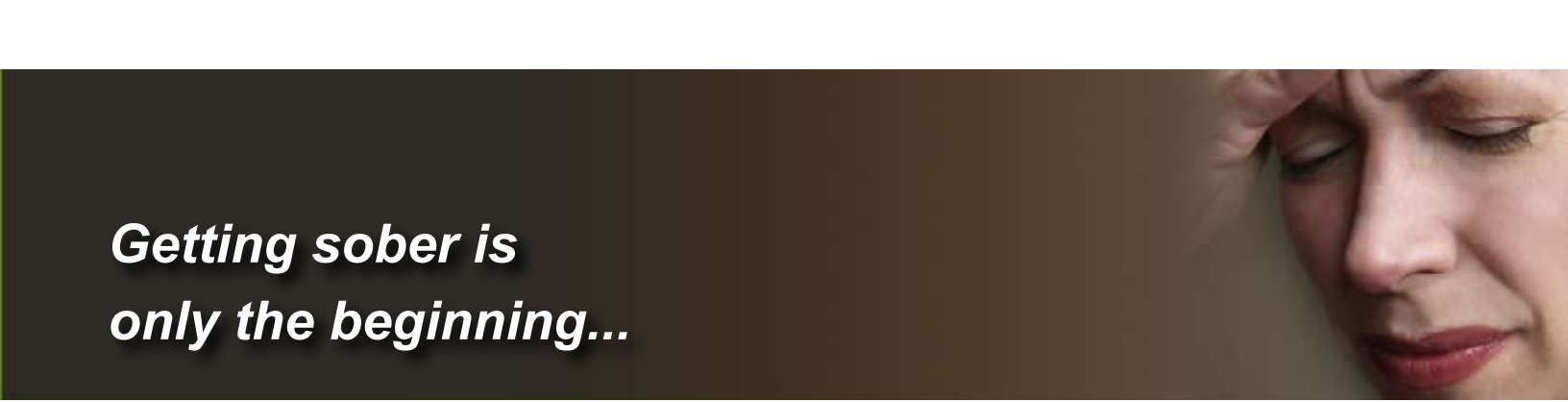
- Feelings of guilt or shame about one's drinking
- Attempts to cut down or stop
- Defensive reactions when confronted about alcohol use
- Denial of alcohol problems even when it is evident to others
- Usually minimizes how much alcohol has been consumed
- Drinking early in the day
- Drinking to deal with a hangover
- Drinking to stop the "shakes"
- Drinking to cope with emotional issues or stress
- Frequent drinking alone
- Inability to stop drinking after a reasonable amount after the first drink
- Often makes statements such as "I need a drink"
- Continued regular or frequent use of alcohol even when it is negatively impacting one's relationships, work, health or finances

### ***The Dangers of Alcohol Withdrawal***

Alcohol withdrawal can be very dangerous and potentially fatal if done without medical supervision. If an alcoholic who has been drinking regularly, and particularly if his use is quite heavy, suddenly stops, he is at high risk for a variety of dangerous withdrawal symptoms.

Delirium tremens (often called "DTs") are a medical emergency, and include the following symptoms: grand mal seizures, sweating, rapid heart beat, agitation, insomnia, nausea and / or vomiting, hallucinations, delusions, panic attacks and anxiety, tremors or shakes, high temperature, confusion, and nightmares.

Alcohol withdrawal is also very unpleasant, and is one of the reasons alcohol addiction is especially hard to overcome. Much of a heavy alcoholic's drinking is to ward off withdrawal symptoms, such as tremors, thus creating a vicious cycle.



## ***Getting sober is only the beginning...***

### ***Addiction and Mental Health Disorders***

#### ***The Dilemma of Dual Diagnosis***

As mentioned earlier in the list of risk factors for addiction, many people drink or use as a way of coping with an underlying mental health disorder. Some statistics suggest that as many as 3 out of 10 addicts have depression as well. When an alcoholic or drug addict meets the criteria for an underlying mental health disorder as well, they have what is called a “dual diagnosis”.

Unfortunately, it is difficult to know the exact numbers of alcoholics and addicts with a dual diagnosis because many have never been diagnosed. When someone has been using a long time it is difficult to accurately diagnose a mental health disorder. Also, until a person is clean and sober, he (as well as others who know him well such as family or a spouse) may not have any idea that an underlying psychiatric condition has been there all along.

In addition to depression, many individuals with bipolar disorder, anxiety disorders, ADHD, and many of the personality disorders (e.g., borderline personality disorder and antisocial personality disorder) often self-medicate as a way to cope with their challenging symptoms. Unfortunately, although drugs and alcohol may provide fleeting relief, they don't help the disorder. In fact, they usually make things worse.

Also, until a person is clean and sober, it is impossible to effectively treat the psychiatric disorder. This is one of the many reasons a good treatment program can be especially beneficial. If you remove the “crutch” (i.e., the drugs or alcohol) that enables the person to cope without learning other, healthier coping skills to replace it, as well as begin the process of treating the mental health condition, the addict or alcoholic will be very likely to relapse.



## ***Getting the Alcoholic or Addict into Treatment***

Hopefully if you've read this far you now have a better understanding of alcoholism and drug addiction. One of the most important things to remember, if you are concerned, angry or fed up with a loved one who is drinking or using is that addictions are powerful, and not just something the person can suddenly decide to just stop. If it were that easy, many of them, if not the majority, would do just that. But as you now know, it is much more complex than that.

The other very important thing for you to know, as mentioned at the beginning, is that there is hope. Addicts and alcoholics become clean and sober every day. Usually it is with the help of supportive family and friends as well as a good treatment program. It is a very rare person who can do it completely on their own.

So, what should you do if your spouse, family member, parent, or close friend has a drug or alcohol addiction? What do you say? How do you let them know you care and are concerned without them becoming defensive? And most importantly, how do you get them into treatment? You're watching them deteriorate before your eyes, and anything you've tried before likely failed.

Well, there are some things you should and should not do if you want to confront them in a way which will be effective. However, before discussing that, there is one other very important thing you must remember:

**YOU** are not responsible for their addiction. You may be contributing to it if you have been enabling them, but you are not responsible for it. Addicts are excellent at coming up with excuses and blaming others.

It is really crucial that you keep this in mind before you make any attempt at an "intervention". Because if you don't, you will be vulnerable to being sucked in to their denial and / or tendency to blame their problem on you. And as long as that dynamic occurs, your attempts will continue to be futile, and any frustration, anger and resentment you feel will only get worse.

***The first step is  
the most difficult one...***



### ***The Intervention***

An intervention is where a group of family and friends confront the person with the addiction and force him or her to admit there is a problem and that it is time to get help. Choosing the right people to be at the intervention is important. You want to have the person whom he respects the most at the meeting. Do not include anyone who has negative feelings towards your loved one or who is not in agreement with the solution you have come up with. The goal is to get him the help he needs; not to point fingers or end up in an argument.

The tone of the intervention should be one of genuine concern. This may be more effective if you schedule it right after a significant negative event, such as the addict's spouse leaving, or he has lost his job, or anything which marks the importance of dealing with the drug addiction to get his life back on track.

Don't come to the intervention without a plan for success. Find a treatment center ahead of time and make sure it has the options you need. Also, make sure it is available to take your loved one immediately. An intervention allows the person with the addiction the opportunity to know that he is loved, that you are truly concerned for his well-being, and that everyone in his life is aware of the addiction. Although there is no guarantee of success, an intervention is often a successful way of confronting an addict and persuading him to get the treatment he needs.

If your loved one refuses your help, make it clear that you will offer no support, including any finances, until he decides to go into treatment. This step may be what gets him to change his mind after he thinks it through.



### ***A Note on Enabling...***

Unfortunately, when it comes to a loved one who is an addict or alcoholic, it can be easy to enable him. Enabling occurs when family members, spouses, or friends inadvertently allow the addict to continue drinking or using because they keep supporting him financially such as by loaning him money, they don't set strong boundaries, such as requiring him to move out if he is going to continue to use, and / or they fail to acknowledge or recognize that his addiction is a really serious problem which may ultimately have dire consequences.

When you enable a loved one, you are basically supporting his addiction by your actions, even though that may not be your desire or even your intention. You must remember that even though it can be very difficult and emotionally painful to withdraw your support if he refuses to get treatment, it may be the very thing that ultimately saves your loved one's life. This is because it may force him to face his addiction or make a decision that, up until then, he was never required to do.

### ***Types of Treatment***

The overall goal of any drug or alcohol treatment program is to help the patient stop using and remain clean and sober long term. In the shorter term, the goals include helping the patient to function at a higher level while reducing the social and health issues which are related to alcohol and drug use. The best treatment programs do not use a cookie-cutter approach to the patients; rather the treatment is tailored to the patient's individual needs as much as possible.

*Following are some of the primary types of treatment options:*

### ***Drug or Alcohol Detox***

The first part of treatment often involves detoxification (detox for short). There are some facilities which provide only detox; however, it is generally best if detox is part of the whole treatment program. With alcohol and many types of drugs, a person who has been using regularly for a long time develops a physiological dependence.

## *First the body heals then the mind...*



When he first stops using, his body is going to begin the process of withdrawal from the substance. With some drugs, this may be somewhat unpleasant but relatively mild in terms of the severity of the withdrawal symptoms. But with alcohol, or drugs such as tranquilizers, the detox part of treatment requires close monitoring by medical professionals. The best detox programs not only deal with the medical / physical aspect of detox, but also provide patient support for the psychological issues related to withdrawal as well.

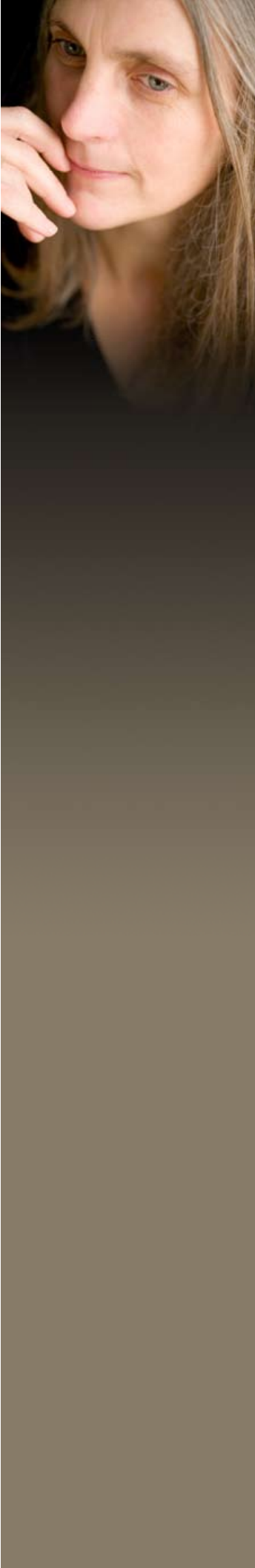
Detox is usually the first step of an inpatient drug and alcohol rehabilitation (rehab for short) program. During this process the body gets rid of all the alcohol and or drugs, and, ideally, any drug residues as well. Medications and other substances, such as fluids to prevent dehydration, are given in order to help control the withdrawal and detox process. They help to prevent or reduce potentially dangerous, as well as distressing and unpleasant, withdrawal symptoms.

Detox for alcohol typically takes 3 to 5 days. Drug detox often takes 5 to 7 days. Detox is required for alcohol and many drugs including heroin, methadone, opioids, pain medications, benzodiazepines, crystal meth, and various other prescription drugs.

### ***Inpatient Rehabilitation***

Inpatient programs typically last for a minimum of 28 days and may last up to a few months or even a year, depending on the needs of the patient. Shorter term programs usually focus more on stabilizing the patient medically, ongoing abstinence, and necessary changes in lifestyle which will help prevent relapse. Often these involve a variation of the 12 step treatment model.

Longer term inpatient (or residential) rehabilitation programs focus on providing a therapeutic environment for the patients. These often include psychotherapy and / or counseling, as well as life skills training, focus on relapse prevention, and other types of education which will benefit the patient to ensure long term success. The advantages of long term inpatient or residential rehabilitation are that it allows the individual to take a break from most of the daily pressures of life so he can focus strictly on his recovery. Also, this type of treatment provides a high degree of structure which is often very beneficial in terms of achieving success long term.



Some inpatient and residential rehab programs have a faith-based component, such as a Christian rehab program. For some individuals, even if they don't share that particular religious belief, they may experience an added level of support and community which is very beneficial to their long term success.

### ***Methadone Maintenance***

Methadone maintenance involves giving the person who is addicted to heroin, morphine, or similar drugs regular doses of methadone. Methadone helps to suppress the individual's cravings for heroin and also the withdrawal symptoms for a 24 hour period. Unfortunately, methadone becomes their new addiction.

### ***Outpatient Drug and Alcohol Treatment***

Outpatient programs are less structured, and have fewer restrictions than inpatient programs. The patient may stay at the facility. These programs quite often offer a multidisciplinary approach, including psychotherapy and 12 step programs. They help the patient to develop a healthy lifestyle and develop a strong support system. Some do provide ongoing medical treatment. This type of program is usually more effective for individuals with a moderate level of addiction than those who are heavily addicted.

### ***12 Step Treatment***

When this model is used the individual is to keep going to meetings indefinitely after they finish the treatment program itself. The philosophy is that they will always be an addict or alcoholic and are powerless over their illness. They have a spiritual component which is typically not specific to any particular religious belief. The meetings, which are usually held daily, provide a sense of ongoing support which many individuals find very helpful.

# *There are a variety of treatment options...*



## ***How to Choose the Right Treatment Program***

Choosing the appropriate treatment program can be a challenging task, but it is a very important one. When you are first looking for a drug and alcohol treatment program, it can be a bit confusing. The best treatment option for your loved one depends on a variety of factors, such as the type of addiction, the severity of the addiction, and whether there are any other issues (which there often are) that need to be addressed in the treatment such as mental health issues, housing needs, vocational needs, and medical issues.

For someone with a fairly short history of addiction, an outpatient treatment program may be all he needs. It may provide sufficient support and treatment to help him get his life back on track and become clean and sober. However, if your loved one has a long history of addiction, an inpatient program is usually the best place to start. Not only will it be a 24/7 program, as mentioned above it will provide a high degree of structure which can be crucial to the success of the individual.

It may be helpful to contact a few different treatment centers by phone in order to ask questions and determine if they are the right fit. Many also have online assessment forms which you can fill out. After you submit the form one of the counselors or staff from the program will review it and contact you to discuss their program and determine if it is the right fit.

## ***Is Treatment Effective?***

For many alcoholics and drug addicts, the right treatment program has helped them to completely turn their life around. In some cases, treatment has literally saved their life, considering the dangerous and destructive path down which they were heading. While some may be resistant to the idea of treatment, or very reluctant to go, many do find that once they begin the process and get through the difficult initial stage of withdrawal and detox, that being in treatment helps them to realize that there is hope of a better life.



It can be very empowering to be surrounded by knowledgeable and supportive treatment staff who can help the person understand his addiction including why he uses. Learning new ways to cope, addressing and treating underlying mental health issues which may exist, and beginning the process of life style changes make life without drugs or alcohol feel possible, whereas it never did before. So, yes, treatment is very effective for many addicts and alcoholics. There is hope for your loved one, no matter how bleak it may feel at this moment!

### ***A Testimonial...***

Following is a letter written by “Mary”, who went through drug rehab at ***Transformations Treatment Center*** in Delray Beach, Florida:

#### ***With Drug Treatment Center Recovery From Addiction Is Possible***

Dear TTC Christian Program Staff,

My name is Mary and I wanted to take a moment and tell you my recovery story and extend my deepest and most heartfelt thanks to your caring staff of rehabilitation specialists, therapists, counselors and everyone else who helped me. Without your Christian drug treatment center, I don't know that I would even be alive today to tell my story.

I began my descent into drugs back when I was a pre-med student in college. A few of the other students and me began using various forms of narcotic pain relievers on a whim, we thought of it as somewhat of a joke. It never dawned on me then that just trying out different drugs could cause so much evil and destruction in my life and cost me so much. I was very wrong and extremely impressionable. Here I was a medical student and I was using drugs as if I hadn't a care in the world. I knew the dangers surrounding drug use, but for some reason I didn't care. Now I know that not caring is one of the hallmark signs of drug abuse and addiction.



## ***Before I could help others I had to help myself...***

My addiction escalated and began to include illicit street drugs such as cocaine and heroin. I had begun using so many different types of drugs I couldn't even begin to tell you all the different kinds. One day after a series of grueling classes, some friends and I decided we need a pick-me-up in the form of an amphetamine. Each of us took an injection and went back to do our midnight rotations at the hospital. I knew immediately something was very wrong, my heart was exploding in my chest, I was sweating profusely and very lightheaded, my knees were weak and I remember nothing after that point.

Waking up in the intensive care unit with tubes stuffed down my throat was a humbling and eye-opening experience for me. It was then that I truly knew the extent of my addiction and that I needed the help of a Christian drug treatment center if I were to get a handle on my drug abuse. I couldn't keep going on like I was; I was destroying myself slowly by poisoning my body with a cocktail of different drugs.

I spoke to the Dean of my program and was surprised at how much compassion and forgiveness I was extended. She told me that in order to remain in my program of study, I needed to seek out a drug treatment program and stop using drugs completely. I knew I had one chance if I was going to turn my life around. Entering your Christian drug treatment program was the best decision I could have ever made.

I knew that if I was going to continue my studies and help others, first I had to help myself. With your Christian drug treatment center, I was able to do just that. From day one, I was treated with the utmost dignity and respect; I was never judged or made to feel ashamed for my problem. I got the help I needed and in the most caring and compassionate manner possible. You helped me find God, taught me to pray and through your guidance, I was able to put the destruction of drugs behind me and start my life over again, fresh and new. I look forward to helping others as much as you have helped me, thank you from the bottom of my heart, I will never, ever forget what you have done for me.

*~Mary*



# **TRANSFORMATIONS**

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