



An Overview on Alcoholism: Its Causes, Symptoms and Treatment

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Description

Alcoholism is a chronic disease characterized by uncontrolled and compulsive alcohol consumption, despite negative consequences on physical and mental health, relationships, and social functioning. It is a prevalent problem worldwide, affecting millions of individuals and their families. The condition can develop gradually over time or manifest suddenly, and it can have severe consequences if left untreated.

Alcoholism is often referred to as Alcohol Use Disorder (AUD) in medical and diagnostic literature, and it encompasses a spectrum of severity, ranging from mild to severe. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of mental disorders, fifth edition (DSM-5), defines AUD as a cluster of symptoms that occur within a 12-month period, including:

1. Drinking more than intended or for a more extended period than intended.
2. Being unable to cut down or stop drinking despite attempts to do so.
3. Spending a considerable amount of time obtaining, using, or recovering from the effects of alcohol.
4. Craving alcohol or experiencing a strong urge to drink.
5. Using alcohol in physically hazardous situations, such as driving or operating machinery.
6. Developing tolerance, which means the person, needs to drink more alcohol to achieve the same effects as before.
7. Experiencing withdrawal symptoms when trying to quit or cut down on drinking.

Not all individuals with AUD experience all of these symptoms, and the severity and duration of each symptom can vary. Moreover, the DSM-5 recognizes that there are different subtypes of AUD, such as mild, moderate, and severe, based on the number of symptoms present.

The causes of alcoholism are multifactorial, including biological, psychological, and environmental factors. Some individuals may have a genetic predisposition to developing AUD, as research has shown that the risk of alcoholism is higher among individuals who have family members with the condition. Other biological factors that can contribute to alcoholism include changes in brain chemistry, hormonal imbalances, and nutritional deficiencies.

Psychological factors, such as stress, trauma, anxiety, and depression, can also play a role in the development of AUD. For example, some individuals may use alcohol as a coping mechanism to deal with negative emotions or to escape from reality. Moreover, people with co-occurring mental health disorders, such as bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, or personality disorders, are at a higher risk of developing alcoholism.

Environmental factors, such as social norms, peer pressure, and availability of alcohol, can also influence the development of AUD. For example, individuals who grow up in households where alcohol use is normalized or encouraged may have a higher risk of developing alcoholism. Similarly, individuals who live in communities where heavy drinking is prevalent may be more likely to develop AUD.

The consequences of alcoholism can be severe and long-lasting, affecting not only the person with AUD but also their families and society as a whole. Physical consequences of alcoholism can include liver disease, gastrointestinal problems, cardiovascular disease, neurological damage, and an increased risk of cancer. Moreover, alcoholism can exacerbate pre-existing mental health conditions or lead to the development of new ones, such as depression, anxiety, and psychosis.

Social consequences of alcoholism can include impaired relationships with family, friends, and coworkers, legal problems such as Driving Under the Influence (DUI) or public intoxication, financial difficulties, and job loss. Additionally, alcoholism can lead to isolation, stigma, and a reduced quality of life.

Treatment for alcoholism typically involves a combination of medical and behavioral interventions. The first step is usually detoxification, which is the process of eliminating alcohol from the body and managing withdrawal symptoms.

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