

# What is Alcohol Abuse?

It's important to understand the nature of alcohol abuse. That's the only way you'll be able to help yourself or others through such a difficult problem. Alcohol abuse can come in many different shapes and forms, but the bottom line is that it's a serious problem that should be understood by everyone.

Alcohol abuse is an all-too-common problem that affects a huge number of people. 86% of the American population reported drinking alcohol at some point in their lives.



# What is Alcohol Addiction/ Abuse?

Alcohol addiction and alcohol abuse are two different conditions, and it's important to understand exactly where it is that they differ. People who abuse alcohol are not necessarily addicted, however alcoholics are almost always considered to be alcohol abusers.

## Alcohol Abuse

Alcohol abuse occurs when someone excessively consumes alcohol. However, one doesn't necessarily need to be addicted to alcohol to abuse it.

For example, if someone drinks alcohol once a month, they would most likely not be considered an alcoholic. However, if they drank irresponsibly to the point of blacking out and hurting themselves or others, that would be considered alcohol abuse.

## Alcohol Addiction

Alcohol addiction, or alcoholism, is a condition in which a person becomes reliant on alcohol to function. There are two types of alcohol addiction, psychological and physical.

Psychological addiction occurs when someone believes that they need alcohol to function. If you have trouble attending a social gathering or going to work without a drink, this is psychological addiction.

Physical addiction means that your body is physically dependent on alcohol. In other words, if you stop drinking, you will go through withdrawal symptoms such as shaking, sweating, or convulsing.

## Types of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism

There are many different types of behavior that fall on the alcohol abuse spectrum. These are collectively known as the different subtypes that further define *alcohol use disorder* as described by the DSM-V.

### Young Social Drinkers

Also referred to as the *young adult subtype*, this subtype is generally under the age of 25. Young social drinkers are somewhat likely to have first- or second-degree relatives with their own drinking problems.

Young social drinkers are at risk because they're more likely to develop serious alcohol problems later in life. While young social drinkers may not necessarily be at the stage of dependence or daily use, it's still important for them to make sure that their habit doesn't spiral out of control.

Fortunately, young social drinkers are less likely to struggle with co-occurring disorders like anxiety or depression. They're less likely to seek treatment for alcoholism unless referred to by a family member, a loved one, or an authority.

Young antisocial drinkers are also generally in their mid-20s. They often come from family backgrounds in which one of their close relatives or immediate family members meet the criteria for alcoholism.

## Young Anti-Social Drinkers

Most importantly, young antisocial drinkers have a history of antisocial behavior. This means that they often had a hard time associating with people in the manner that their society deems to be regular. This means that they weren't able to have friendly interactions with others.

Young antisocial drinkers often picked up their habit in their teenage years and continued to drink regularly. A good portion - about three quarters - of young antisocial drinkers also regularly smoke tobacco. Two out of every three smoke cannabis and between 20-25% of them use harder drugs like cocaine or opiates [according to alcohol.org](#).

According to the same research, about 21% of all alcoholics are considered young antisocial drinkers.. Out of them, about a third would go on to seek treatment for their alcohol problem on their own.

## Functional

A functional alcoholic is someone who appears to be able to function normally despite having an addiction to alcohol. They are often able to hold down a job or attend school without damaging their reputation.

High functioning alcoholics meet all the criteria of a substance abuse disorder, but their personal and work life don't seem to suffer very much as a result. Functional alcoholics often haven't hit rock bottom, and some of them never do.

However, the physical and mental effects of extreme alcohol consumption often creep up on functional alcoholics, affecting them when they reach old age.

Many functional alcoholics don't actually drink to get drunk. Instead, they drink casually throughout the day to make sure that they don't fall into alcohol withdrawal. Some just drink to get rid of cravings. Yet other functional alcoholics just binge drink on the weekends or in the evening.

None of this means that functional alcoholics are free from the dangers of alcoholism, however. In most cases, this just means that the functional alcoholic is yet to see the effects of alcoholism. In all cases of alcohol abuse, it's a good idea to get yourself into recovery as soon as possible.

## Intermediate

Known fully as the *intermediate familial type alcoholic*, this particular subtype of alcoholic has a number of traits that are particular to them.

The majority of intermediate familial type alcoholics are males - roughly 66%, according to [alcohol.org](http://alcohol.org). Most of these people began drinking alcohol in their teenage years and had family members who did the same.

A lot of intermediate alcoholics also have one or more other disorders, such as depression or anxiety. Many of them also struggle with multiple substance use disorders, with a large portion using tobacco and marijuana. Many are also known [to use cocaine](#).

A fair number of intermediate alcoholics will seek rehab treatment on their own, but others have to be encouraged by their family members or authorities.

Once in rehab, many intermediate alcoholics need to take advantage of withdrawal management systems. Withdrawal symptoms may range from mild to very severe and could result in hospitalization if the person doesn't receive adequate treatment.

Social support groups and private treatments, offering medical assistance and therapy, are often helpful though not always necessary for an intermediate alcoholic.

## **Chronic/Severe**

The chronic/severe alcoholic subtype is the most serious subtype of alcoholism that there is.

Most people who become chronic or severe alcoholics began drinking at an early age, with the average age of drinking being just under 16 years. Although chronic/severe alcoholics often start drinking at an early age, very few of them are diagnosed until later in life - around the age of 30.

Chronic and severe alcoholics rarely have a day without alcohol. They are most likely to require hospitalization due to their alcohol use, and they are going to have more difficulty maintaining a normal lifestyle due to their drinking.

Many chronic and severe alcoholics struggle with other health conditions like bipolar, major depressive disorder, anxiety, panic disorder, and social phobias. They are more likely to use other drugs in addition to alcohol.

If you or a loved one have chronic/severe alcoholism, it's a good idea to make sure that you seek hospitalization or assisted detox when attempting to stop drinking. This is because the risk of having seizures is much more serious when someone has become a chronic alcoholic

## Effects of Alcohol Abuse on Your Body

There are a lot of different effects that alcohol can have on your body. Some of the most common effects are:

### **Short-term effects:**

- Decreased coordination
- Dizziness
- Increased blood pressure
- Difficulty staying awake
- Relaxation
- Increased bowel movements
- Hangovers
- Sweating
- Digestive issues

## **Long-term effects:**

- Alcoholism
- Withdrawal symptoms, which can include seizures
- Malnutrition
- Cancer
- Pancreatitis
- Ulcers
- Digestive issues

# How Addictive is Alcohol?

Despite the fact that alcohol is widely available and consumed by large numbers of people, it's still incredibly dangerous. Many people are unaware of the fact that alcohol is one of the most addictive drugs on the planet.

Alcohol can create addiction fairly easily. It can lead to both physical and psychological addiction in a period of days or weeks.

When someone becomes physically addicted to alcohol, they will have to endure withdrawal symptoms. The body becomes accustomed to the presence of alcohol, and requires a period of adjustment once it no longer receives a steady supply of alcohol.

Depending on the severity of the addiction, withdrawal symptoms range from mild to very serious. Mild withdrawal symptoms are similar, but more persistent, to those of a hangover: nausea, shaking, sweats, diarrhea, and increased blood pressure.

Serious withdrawal symptoms are much more debilitating. Serious withdrawal causes cognitive problems, difficulty thinking, paranoia and delusions, audio hallucinations, difficulty walking, tremors, and even fatal seizures.

Psychological addiction to alcohol can occur with a single use. If a person discovers that alcohol helps them to mask the symptoms of a

condition like anxiety or depression, they will likely continue to drink for those reasons.

Unfortunately, this compounds the addictive nature of alcohol. Rather than treating the actual issue, this encourages people to drink away the symptoms of their problems. This leads to increased symptoms and the need to drink larger and larger amounts, which often results in physical addiction.

The widespread availability of alcohol also contributes to its addictive nature. While alcohol may be illegal for minors to purchase, it is generally not hard for them to acquire. Since it's sold at stores all over the world, they can simply find someone to 'boot' them alcohol.

In addition, the availability of alcohol can make it difficult for recovering alcoholics to stay clean. Once a recovering alcoholic is released from treatment, they may find the temptation of purchasing liquor overwhelming and end up relapsing.

## Who is at Risk?

While nobody is completely free from the risks of alcohol addiction, there are certainly some people who are more at risk than others. If you or a loved one struggle with any of the following risk factors, you might be more likely to develop an alcohol addiction.

- **People with family members who struggle with alcoholism.** If you live with someone or even have a second or third relative who

struggles with alcoholism, you may be more likely to develop alcoholism yourself. This is especially true for people who are living in the same household as someone who struggles with an alcohol addiction.

- **People with mental health issues.** People who struggle with mental health issues like depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder or anything else may be more prone to develop alcoholism. Some people use alcohol to self-medicate and consider this to be an easier solution than addressing the root issues of their problem.
- **Chemical imbalances.** Alcohol affects the brain's GABA system, which is responsible for regulating anxiety and excitement. People with GABA imbalances may be more prone to developing an alcohol addiction.
- **Genetics.** If you have someone in your lineage who has struggled with alcoholism, then you may be genetically predisposed to develop alcoholism yourself. It's important to take extra care if you have a family history of alcoholism.

- **Chemical imbalances.** Alcohol affects the brain's GABA system, which is responsible for regulating anxiety and excitement. People with GABA imbalances may be more prone to developing an alcohol addiction.
- **Peer pressure or positive expectations.** Peer pressure can lead someone to develop an alcohol disorder, whether that is active or passive peer pressure. Active peer pressure occurs when a group encourages someone to use alcohol. Passive peer pressure occurs when someone believes that their peer group is doing something worthy of emulating. Passive peer pressure can lead someone to develop positive expectations about alcohol abuse.
- **Environmental factors.** A number of environmental factors can play into a person's likelihood of developing alcoholism. People who live in areas where alcohol is heavily promoted, such as urban centers, are more likely to drink than those who live in rural areas.
- **Social and cultural factors.** People are going to be more likely to drink if they live in a culture or social circle that encourages alcoholism. Conversely, people who are raised in a city, family, or religious environment that looks down upon drinking are much less likely to develop problems with alcohol.

- **Finances.** A person's financial situations can play into their likelihood to drink alcohol. In some situations, low-income families faced with hardships may encourage family members to drink. On the other hand, evidence suggests that families with a higher income tend to drink more frequently.

# Signs and Symptoms of Alcohol Abuse

Understanding the signs and symptoms of alcohol abuse is the only way that you're going to be able to figure out if you or a loved one is struggling with an alcohol problem. This section will help you identify the signs of alcoholism.

## Signs of Alcohol Abuse

There are a number of signs that can indicate that someone is struggling with alcohol abuse. These signs and symptoms can either be physical or mental in nature.

### Physical Signs of Alcohol Abuse

- Being hungover or displaying signs of hangovers on a regular basis. These can include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, lack of energy, excessive anxiety, and dysphoria.
- Regularly missing school, work, or social engagement due to alcohol.

- Being unable to function or maintain a regular energy level without having a drink.
- Displaying signs of alcohol withdrawal when unable to have a drink: shaking, sweating, shivering, extreme anxiety, having difficulty thinking or talking, difficulty making eye contact, seeming ‘jittery.’
- Changes in sleep schedule.
- Changes in weight or appetite, suddenly eating much more or much less, changes in diet choices.

## **Emotional Symptoms of Alcohol Abuse**

- Being unable to participate in social interactions without having a drink, frequently missing out on social gatherings.
- Increasing levels of anxiety.
- Changes in emotional stability, frequently lashing out, depressive episodes, spending more time isolated and away from friends or family.
- Having a harder time communicating, changes in verbal fluidity, frequently slurring or stuttering.
- Changes in lifestyle choices, hanging around with different people, neglecting personal relationships.

## **Other Signs of Alcohol Abuse**

- Being hungover or displaying signs of hangovers on a regular basis. These can include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, lack of energy, excessive anxiety, and dysphoria.
- Regularly missing school, work, or social engagement due to alcohol.
- Being unable to function or maintain a regular energy level without having a drink.

- Displaying signs of alcohol withdrawal when unable to have a drink: shaking, sweating, shivering, extreme anxiety, having difficulty thinking or talking, difficulty making eye contact, seeming ‘jittery.’
- Changes in sleep schedule.
- Changes in weight or appetite, suddenly eating much more or much less, changes in diet choices.

# Dangers of alcohol abuse

Make no mistake - alcohol abuse is a very dangerous problem. Many people underestimate the seriousness of alcohol abuse because so many people, including celebrities, fall victim to it. Unfortunately, alcohol abuse can lead to a number of problems in a person’s life.

Some of the most significant dangers of alcohol abuse include:

## Physical health problems

Alcohol abuse can lead to all sorts of physical health problems.

- *Hangovers.* Even short-term alcohol abuse over a single night can lead to debilitating hangovers, filled with nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea.
- *Withdrawal symptoms.* People who abuse alcohol for days or weeks on end may experience withdrawal symptoms when they

stop drinking. Withdrawal symptoms can range from relatively mild (sweating and shaking) to very serious (seizures and death).

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- *Damage to organs and tissues.* Long-term exposure to alcohol, especially hard alcohol, can lead to damaged organs and tissues. The liver, heart, kidneys, and stomach are particularly at risk.

## Mental health problems

Even though many people use alcohol to try to deal with pre-existing mental health problems, it often tends to aggravate them in the long-run. Alcohol can even lead to the development of health problems that people didn't have in the first place.

- *Increased anxiety.* While alcohol may temporarily numb feelings of anxiety, long-term alcohol use can significantly worsen an anxiety problem. Alcoholism can also cause anxiety in those who have never experienced it before.
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- *Emotional instability.* Alcohol tends to 'shorten a person's fuse,' making them prone to irrational outbursts or bouts of anger.
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- *Memory problems.* Alcohol can damage a person's memory. In addition to causing blackouts - periods of hours or even entire nights which disappear from a person's memory - alcohol can impair short and long-term memory formation.

- *Depression.* Long-term alcoholism can lead to depression.

## Lifestyle problems

Alcohol is notorious for having a damaging effect on a person's lifestyle.

- *Family problems.* Alcohol can cause serious friction in a family environment. This can lead to problems engaging with family and can lead to distancing, trauma, or other familial issues.
- *Difficulty maintaining personal relationships.* Alcoholics often have a hard time maintaining romantic relationships. It can be extremely difficult for a partner to stay with someone who is emotionally volatile and often incoherent. It's also hard for alcoholics to dedicate themselves to a relationship when they're already nursing their relationship with alcohol.
- *Problems in school or work.* Many alcoholics find that they end up missing school or work due to hangovers or other alcohol-related issues. This can affect their grades or lead to them getting fired.
- *Financial problems.* In addition to the risk of getting fired, alcoholics often spend far more money than they intend to. Not only does the cost of drinks add up, alcohol tends to reduce a person's inhibitions. They become more likely to impulsively spend money on shopping, ordering food, or taking taxis.
- *Social problems.* Many alcoholics find that they lose friends as they become more dependent on alcohol. They become less like themselves, sacrificing their personality for their preference to drink. Some alcoholics often find that they damage their reputation

or social standing by acting inappropriately in public spaces.

These are just a few of the many issues that a person can experience if they start to abuse alcohol.

# **How is Alcohol Abuse Diagnosed?**

## **Recognizing Alcohol Abuse and Alcohol Use Disorder (AUD)**

It's easy enough to tell when someone's been drinking a lot. Their movements will be uncoordinated, their speech will be different or slurred, and you'll probably be able to smell alcohol on their breath.

Unfortunately, trying to recognize alcohol abuse can be a bit more difficult than simply recognizing when someone is drunk. To recognize alcohol abuse, you have to recognize certain patterns that emerge when a person starts to consume alcohol on a regular basis.

### **Difference Between Alcohol Abuse and AUD**

Alcohol abuse is no longer an officially recognized term in the DSM-V, however, it's still a commonly discussed term. Many articles, mental health professionals, and people discuss alcohol abuse, so it's important to know the difference between alcohol abuse and AUD.

AUD is generally recognized as being more severe than alcohol abuse. One of the main differences is that people who abuse alcohol don't necessarily have a physical dependence on alcohol. Though they may show a lot of the same behaviors and symptoms, they may not drink enough to experience withdrawal symptoms.

Anyone who is unable to control their drinking would be abusing alcohol. This means that binge drinkers would be considered alcohol abusers, even if they drink rather infrequently. If someone drinks to the point of blacking out and forgetting their night, then they have abused alcohol.

Alcohol abuse may initially be less severe, but it's important to acknowledge that it can be just as dangerous. If you don't find a way to work through your alcohol abuse before it's too late, it can easily lead to AUD.

## **Symptoms of Alcohol Problems**

There are a number of criteria that a person must meet to be considered to suffer from alcohol use disorder. While alcohol abuse and AUD are different, both conditions share similar symptoms. Some of the most common symptoms are:

- Being unable to control alcohol consumption
- Having extreme cravings or feeling compelled to drink
- Developing a tolerance, needing to drink stronger or more beverages to reach the same level
- Drinking to feel normal
- Stashing alcohol in places for easy access, like at work or in school
- Spending a lot of time drinking alone, hiding drinking
- Drinking despite the emerging negative consequences
- Spending a lot of time drinking alone, hiding drinking

## **Withdrawal Symptoms**

Withdrawal symptoms are generally a serious indicator that someone is struggling with alcohol abuse. Symptoms include nausea, sweating, shaking, hallucinations, convulsions, and vomiting.

## **Diagnosing Alcohol Use Disorder**

There isn't necessarily one single way to diagnose AUD. Since the condition is as much psychological as it is physical, there isn't a simple test that your doctor can give you to determine whether or not you're struggling with AUD.

A diagnosis involves an evaluation of certain criteria and behavior patterns. Many doctors or psychiatrists will give their patients a

questionnaire that allows them to check off certain behaviors that they recognize in themselves.

If they check off a certain number of these behaviors, then they would be deemed to have AUD. Family members or friends may be given similar questionnaires to answer, as it could be easy for an alcoholic to falsify the answers on their test if they weren't interested in seeking treatment.

Once you have been diagnosed with AUD, the next step would be to seek treatment. Depending on the severity of your addiction, you may need to participate in a medically sanctioned detox to avoid experiencing dangerous withdrawal symptoms.

## Treatment and Next Steps

After receiving a diagnosis, the next step would be to seek treatment. There are a number of different steps involved in treatment, each one being just as important as the next.

Treatment for any addiction is generally a combination of physical rehabilitation, therapy, group counseling, and isolation to prevent someone in recovery from relapsing. This section will briefly detail the different aspects of treatment and the following aspects of recovery.

### Detox

Detox is the first step for many people. However, not everyone requires detox. People who deal with occasional alcohol abuse, such as weekend

binge drinkers, most likely won't need to attend a detox program as they won't be dealing with any serious withdrawal symptoms.

However, long-term drinkers would do well to attend a medically sanctioned detox. Alcohol withdrawal is one of the few forms of withdrawal that can be serious enough to actually kill you. In a detox program, you'll be surrounded by medical professionals who can monitor you and make sure that you stay in good health.

## **Rehab Treatment**

There are generally two types of rehab: inpatient rehab and outpatient rehab. Inpatient rehab is more intensive and requires that you remain at the facility for your entire treatment. Outpatient rehab is less intensive and allows you to come and go. More on these types of rehab below.

There are many different things involved in rehab.

- Counseling and therapy are the backbones of most treatment plans. They help you to develop the skills and provide you with tools to make sure that you don't relapse when you finish treatment.
- Group meetings often take place at treatment centers, encouraging recovering alcoholics to discuss their experiences with each other. These help to inspire communication and honesty and can be fantastic learning opportunities.
- In most rehabs, medical professionals will be on-site to help you deal with any issues that you might encounter related to your

recovery.

Different rehab centers will offer different services. They may cater to your individual experience and help you build an individualized treatment plan based on your personal experience.

## **Aftercare**

Even after you've finished rehab, that doesn't mean your recovery is finished. In truth, recovery is never really finished: you're always going to be working hard to make sure that you don't relapse. This is one of the reasons that aftercare is so important.

Aftercare is a term used to describe the various tools, services, and techniques that people in recovery use to help them avoid relapsing.

Aftercare can include:

- Regular checkups with a therapist or counselor to help you keep track of where you are in your recovery.
- Going to A.A. meetings to engage with and share with other recovering alcoholics.
- Taking time to connect with family members and friends to keep them informed about your recovery.

Aftercare is quite possibly the most important part of your recovery, because it is the part of your recovery that lasts the longest. While rehab treatment may only take a few months, you should make a point of

participating in aftercare for many months or years after your treatment is finished.

## **Detox for Alcohol Abuse**

The process of detoxing from alcohol can be very intense. It's important that you understand the risks of alcohol detox before you attempt to go through with it.

For people who only struggle with mild to moderate alcohol abuse, alcohol detox may not be too difficult. They may struggle with manageable withdrawal symptoms, or none at all. However, people who are physically addicted to alcohol run the risk of experiencing serious physical withdrawal symptoms and even death.

This section will explain the details of alcohol detox.

### **What is Alcohol Detoxification?**

Alcohol detoxification, or alcohol detox, is the process by which you eliminate alcohol from your body. Alcohol detox is generally uncomfortable. Depending on the severity of the alcohol addiction, it can range from mildly uncomfortable to seriously debilitating.

Alcohol detox is safer if it's done under the supervision of a medically supervised team. There are a few reasons for this.

- Alcohol detox can be physically debilitating. If it's serious enough, it can lead to seizures and death. Medical professionals can help to ensure that no harm comes to the recovering alcoholic, and can provide reassurance during difficult times.
- If you've been drinking for a long time, your body has become dependent on alcohol. That means that it's going to go into stress if you suddenly stop drinking. This is part of the reason that detox is so uncomfortable: your body simply isn't sure how to cope without alcohol.
- A medical team can also provide you with psychological help. Alcohol detox can be unnerving and emotionally difficult, and it helps to have a team of trained professionals to guide you through the whole process.

Alcohol detox is the first phase of treatment, and also the most difficult. Many people attempt to detox from alcohol on their own, but this can be very difficult and lead them to relapse.

This is one of the main reasons that people have more success when going through detox at a medically supervised treatment center.

## **The Process of Detoxification**

The process of detoxification may vary slightly from person to person, but the general experience is the same. This is a general timeline of alcohol detox.

### **0-6 Hours**

Depending on the severity of the alcoholism, the type of alcohol consumed, and the frequency of consumption, the first 6 hours of alcohol detox may be different. Some people may experience no discomfort, whereas others may begin to experience withdrawal symptoms.

## **6-12 Hours**

For most people, this is when the initial symptoms of alcohol withdrawal begin to appear. People may begin to feel uneasy, disoriented, or slightly anxious during these hours.

## **12-24 Hours**

As you're approaching a full day without alcohol, withdrawal symptoms are going to become more pronounced. You may experience new symptoms, and the symptoms that you were experiencing before will become more intense.

## **24-48 Hours**

This is the stage during which the most difficult and painful symptoms of withdrawal will become apparent. This is most likely the stage during which medical professionals will administer medication.

Medication can be used to help eliminate some of the most dangerous

and unpleasant symptoms of alcohol withdrawal. For example, you may be given benzodiazepines to help reduce the risk of seizures.

Many people begin to experience hallucinations, panic attacks, and delusions during this period of alcohol withdrawal. These symptoms occur because the body's neurotransmitter systems become over-excited. This causes excessive stimulation in the nervous system, which can be extremely uncomfortable.

## **Day 3-7**

The most intense and severe withdrawal symptoms will likely persist for several days. During days 3-7, you may experience the coming and going of different symptoms. Serious, life-threatening symptoms can emerge and regress during this time, so it's important to make sure that you're under the care of licensed professionals.

## **After a Week**

After day 7, most people begin to experience a reduction in their symptoms. In most cases, the more serious symptoms have abated. The recovering alcoholic is most likely not at risk of having fatal seizures anymore.

Mild-to-moderate symptoms may persist for weeks or even months. The

GABA system takes a while to repair itself, and during this time you may be prone to anxiety, confusion, disorientation, or cognitive problems.

The problem of post-acute withdrawal syndrome (PAWS) is also a reality. PAWS is a condition that can last weeks, months, or years after a person has overcome their primary withdrawal symptoms. Symptoms of PAWS often include anxiety, fatigue, difficulty sleeping, slow reflexes, and memory issues.

PAWS can be difficult to overcome, but with the assistance of therapy and aftercare it will be easier to work through.

## **Alcohol Withdrawal Symptoms**

It can be useful to have a bit more detail about the alcohol withdrawal symptoms that you might experience during an alcohol detox.

### **Stage 1**

Stage 1 withdrawal symptoms begin relatively soon after the last drink. Most people tend to experience these symptoms after about 8 hours, but some people may begin to experience onset symptoms as early as 2 hours after their last drink.

Common stage 1 withdrawal symptoms include anxiety, insomnia, nausea, and abdominal cramping or discomfort.

## **Stage 2**

Stage 2 withdrawal symptoms generally occur between 24-72 hours after a person has had their last drink. Stage 2 withdrawal symptoms are generally more serious, and can occasionally be fatal. Stage 2 symptoms include high blood pressure, high body temperature, changes to heart rate, confusion, cognitive problems, and malaise.

## **Stage 3**

Stage 3 withdrawal symptoms are very serious, uncomfortable, and can be fatal. These symptoms can start anywhere from 2-4 days after a person has had their last drink. Stage 3 hallucinations include fevers, seizures, and extreme agitation.

# **Side-Effects of Alcohol Detox**

Most of the side effects of alcohol detox are a result of your body adjusting to life without alcohol.

These are known as withdrawal symptoms, not side effects. Withdrawals symptoms can be both physical and psychological in nature, and they can be very difficult to cope with.

One of the most important reasons to seek treatment at a medically supervised detox center is because you'll be supervised by trained professionals. These people will be able to help you cope with the most difficult alcohol detox side effects.

If you attempt to detox on your own, you run the risk of compromising your health. You'll have to deal with side effects like sweating, shaking, anxiety, tremors, and nausea on your own.

In most cases, these side effects aren't enough to be cause for alarm. However, some people will have to deal with stage 3 withdrawal symptoms. These are very serious side effects that can include delusions, seizures, and serious agitation.

Without proper supervision, these side effects can get out of control quite quickly. Seizures can lead to fatal convulsions. Delusions and hallucinations can lead to a recovering alcoholic behaving in a dangerous or irrational manner.

If you're thinking about going through an alcohol detox, it's probably a good idea for you to seek treatment from a medically sanctioned detox center.

## **Dangers of Detoxing Alone**

Many people are tempted to go through alcohol detox on their own. The temptations are understandable: it's cheaper, and you won't have to be at the mercy of doctors and nurses for a week or more.

While it might be tempting to go through it alone, there are some serious dangers that you should be aware of before you think about detoxing alone.

## **Risk of Death**

There is a very real risk of death when you're going through alcohol detox.

Alcohol stimulates the brain's GABA system. GABA is a neurotransmitter that helps to regulate the rest of your body's *excitatory neurotransmitters*. These are chemicals that stimulate the mind and body. GABA keeps them from overreacting.

However, when you stop drinking alcohol, your body no longer knows how to produce GABA on its own. This means that your body's excitatory neurotransmitters are unchecked, and they can overstimulate the rest of your body. This can lead to intensive anxiety, tremors, and even seizures.

## **Relapse**

One of the main reasons that people prefer to go to a medically supervised detox is to help reduce the chance of relapse.

Many people are able to push through the beginning of their detox phase without problem. Alcoholics who aren't deep enough to reach stage 3 withdrawals may be able to avoid drinking for a few days, and they may even get through the worst of their withdrawal symptoms.

However, if you're on your own, there's nothing to stop you from relapsing. Many people are dismayed to find that, even after overcoming their withdrawal symptoms, they are tempted to drink again. Without learning the tools and techniques that a treatment center will teach you, it can be difficult to resist these temptations.

## **Dangerous Behavior**

Alcohol withdrawal symptoms can lead to delusions, hallucinations, and emotional instability. People going through alcohol withdrawal often have a hard time coping with their feelings. This, coupled with psychosis and delusions, can lead to dangerous and potentially violent behavior.

Getting treated at a medically supervised detox center helps to ensure that you won't get out of hand and that you won't hurt yourself or any of your loved ones. If you begin acting dangerously, medical professionals can administer some medication to help you manage your symptoms.

## **Emotional Health Problems**

Detox from any substance can be difficult. The person going through detox likely feels as if they're cutting contact with a close friend who has been there for them throughout the hardest parts of their life.

This, in addition to the biochemical imbalances, is a recipe for emotional disturbances. While these emotional issues will likely still occur in a detox facility, it can be very helpful to be in the care of trained psychologists or counselors.

# **Treatment and Rehab for Alcohol Abuse**

The next stage on the journey to recovery is rehabilitation. Rehab is the period during which a recovering alcoholic will learn the skills and techniques that can help them stay sober.

Rehab is often a blend of a number of different things. Rehab can include a medically-supervised detox phase, medication to help ease someone away from alcohol, and a variety of different counseling sessions, therapies, and group meetings.

Addiction treatment is often the pivotal moment for many recovering alcoholics. While the road to recovery is long, many alcoholics find that their time at rehab is the most transformative. Here, they often make connections and form long-lasting friendships with other recovering alcoholics.

## **Treatment options**

There are lots of different treatment options available. Treatments aim to uproot the behavioral and psychological issues that lead someone to addiction.

The two main types of treatment are *inpatient* and *outpatient* treatment, which we'll discuss in detail below. In short, inpatient rehab is much more intensive and outpatient rehab is more forgiving.

Many respected treatment centers develop treatment plans based on the individuals who are actually seeking help. In this case, it can be difficult to lump different treatments together under the same name.

For example, an addiction worker might give you an assessment to evaluate your specific needs. They will consider your medical history, your current addiction, any past traumas you might be carrying, and your current mental health. Using all of this information, they will produce a treatment plan that caters specifically to you.

## Medication

Your treatment plan may include the use of medication.

Medication is most often used during the early phases of treatment, especially during the detox phase. This is especially true for serious alcoholics, who run the risk of having fatal seizures during their detox phase.

The most commonly used medication for this purpose is some form of *benzodiazepine*. Benzodiazepines work on the GABA system - the same system that alcohol influences. Benzodiazepines are antispasmodics and can help reduce the chances of having seizures. They can also help to eliminate a number of the other unwanted symptoms of alcohol withdrawal.

Some treatment centers may also prescribe benzodiazepines to help manage anxiety after the detox phase is finished. You should recognize that, while benzos might be effective at reducing withdrawal symptoms, this is simply because they are another GABA-ergic drug. Use them for long enough and you'll experience withdrawal symptoms that are just as intense, if not more intense, than your alcohol withdrawals.

Most physicians are aware of this, and will try to avoid over-prescribing these medications. However, some physicians and psychiatrists are willing to provide benzodiazepines as a replacement for alcohol. This is dangerous and should be avoided unless you're aware of the risks.

Some rehab and treatment centers may also provide medication to help encourage good sleep. Insomnia is common during the days and weeks after going through alcohol detox, and having a good night's sleep can help ensure that you get the most out of your treatment program.

## Detox

Detox can vary depending on the drug that you're trying to stop using.

- **Detox for alcohol** generally lasts between 3-7 days. This is long enough for the most intensive symptoms to disappear. Alcohol detox can be extremely intense and, if it's not dealt with properly, can lead to fatal seizures.
- 
- Anyone quitting alcohol should make sure that they're taken care of in a medically supervised detox facility. Here, medically trained professionals will be able to provide you with medications that can help prevent any dangerous withdrawal symptoms from causing harm.
- 
- **Detox for opiates** often lasts from 3-7 days. While withdrawal from opiates is not fatal, it can be extremely uncomfortable. Opiate detox generally leaves people restless, agitated, nauseous and vomiting for the better part of a week.
- 
- Some detox facilities may provide opiate users with benzodiazepines. These can help to reduce some of the physical

and mental anguish associated with the detox phase. While it is possible to detox from opiates without the aid of a medical facility, it can be very difficult and the risk of relapse is high.

- **Detox for stimulants** like cocaine or methamphetamine can last as little as 3 days. Since stimulants don't often cause many physical withdrawal symptoms, most of the hardship associated with detox is psychological. In that sense, people withdrawing from stimulants may not need medical help at all.
- 
- However, some people who have been abusing stimulants for months or years may wind up in psychosis. In this case, it can be useful to be under watchful supervision during the detox phase.

## Inpatient

Inpatient rehab is the more intensive form of treatment.

Inpatient rehab is generally recommended for people who have serious addictions. Often, inpatient residents have already attempted and failed to seek treatment at an outpatient treatment center.

During inpatient treatment, you are committed to the facility for the course of your treatment. Except for serious medical emergencies that can't be treated on-site, you'll have to stay in the facility. You may or may not be allowed to have family members visit you during the course of the treatment.

This can certainly make inpatient treatment more uncomfortable for some. However, it also helps to ensure that your treatment is effective. Outpatient rehab is risky because it's easy for people to relapse as they

come and go from the rehab facility. Inpatient rehab does not allow for this possibility.

Also, during an inpatient treatment session, you are only ever going to be interacting with two types of people: trained recovery professionals and other recovering alcoholics or addicts. This means that recovery is constantly going to be in the front of your mind. Many recovering alcoholics find that this constant reminder encourages them to make positive long-lasting choices.

Inpatient rehab is generally costlier than outpatient rehab. This is because the cost of treatment also includes your room and board, your meals, and constant supervision. However, the upside is that inpatient is more likely to lead to a permanent recovery.

## **Outpatient**

Outpatient rehab is a bit less intensive than inpatient rehab.

Outpatient rehab is generally recommended for people who are struggling with mild-to-moderate addictions, or for people who have never attended rehab before. It's also generally recommended only for people who truly desire to stop drinking alcohol.

During the course of an outpatient rehab treatment, you're allowed to come and go from the facility. As long as you attend your scheduled meetings and classes, then you're not required to stay.

This has obvious benefits.

- You're allowed to engage with friends and family during your treatment. This is ideal, especially for people who are trying to raise a family or maintain a personal relationship.
- You'll be able to continue your school or work without having to inform them that you're going to treatment.
- You'll be free to actively engage in hobbies and activities that you enjoy. This is instrumental as staying busy can help keep your mind off of your addiction.

However, there are also some drawbacks to outpatient rehab - namely the fact that it's much easier to relapse. Since you're not confined to the facility, nothing is stopping you from going to the liquor store aside from your own willpower. Many people, especially newly recovering alcoholics, find this difficult to cope with.

The other issue is that you won't have constant access to psychological or medical assistance. This can be useful during the first week or two of treatment.

## How to Decide on Treatment

There are a few things that you're going to want to consider when you decide on your treatment.

### Medical history

Do you have any serious previous medical history? If you have a history of psychiatric or physical illness, it could be a good idea to seek

inpatient or specialized treatment - especially during the initial withdrawal phase.

Going through detox and treatment can trigger latent diseases, both physical and mental. These can add unnecessary stress to the already-difficult treatment process and can overwhelm a recovering alcohol.

If you have no prior medical history and are otherwise in sound health, then you may do well in outpatient treatment.

## **Addiction severity**

The main consideration when deciding upon a certain type of treatment is how addicted you are.

If you're seriously addicted to alcohol and are going to be going through withdrawal symptoms, then it's a good idea to seek treatment at a detox. However, deciding whether to attend outpatient or inpatient rehab is a different question entirely.

The length and intensity of the addiction will both play into your decision. People who have drunk large amounts of alcohol for a shorter period of months may be able to tackle their problem with a detox and a stint in outpatient recovery. Long-term alcoholics who have been drinking smaller amounts for decades may need inpatient rehab to help them break some of the habits that they've ingrained.

## **Finances**

Another deciding factor is going to be your finances. Inpatient rehab is more expensive than outpatient rehab, but it also offers more comprehensive care. However, outpatient rehab may end up being more expensive in the long-run should you decide to relapse after finishing a treatment program.

## Paying for Treatment

Rehab treatment is expensive - there's no way around it. Fortunately, it's possible that you can pay for at least part of your treatment with insurance.

Two of the most commonly-used payment methods are known as Medicaid and Medicare. These are both federal and state-funded insurance programs that can help to offset the cost of addiction treatment. Each program has different eligibility requirements, depending on the state that you live in.

- **Medicaid** is a public insurance program for low-income families. The Affordable Care Act (ACA) requires that insurance companies cover the basic aspects of drug and alcohol recovery. It's important to note that while Medicaid is generally willing to cover treatment costs, not all treatment facilities will accept Medicaid.
- **Medicare** is a program available for seniors and people with disabilities. Medicare can cover the price of drug rehab. The Medicare program is broken into 4 separate parts, each one of which will cover a different aspect of your treatment plan.

Depending on your eligibility, Medicare or Medicaid may cover some or all of the costs of your treatment.

You may also be eligible for both Medicaid and Medicare. This is known as *dual eligibility*. If this is the case for you, you can receive both benefits.

If you're not currently signed up for Medicaid or Medicare, then you should contact an insurance caseworker. They'll be able to provide you with all the details that you need to sign up, and will be able to inform you as to whether or not you can pay for your treatment plan with your insurance.

## **Does the ACA cover addiction treatment?**

The Affordable Care Act (ACA) came into action in 2010. Also known as *Obamacare*, this new system required that insurance providers cover the basic aspects of drug and alcohol recovery.

The ACA allows you to check out sponsored insurance plans through their online platform, the Health Insurance Marketplace. This is where you can find a treatment plan that will function in a similar way as a private insurance plan.

The ACA also helps to expand the funding made available to people through the Medicaid and Medicare program. These two systems, however, have separate eligibility requirements.

The ACA says that addiction treatment needs to be as comprehensive as any other medical treatment. Things that are included in an ACA-based insurance plan include:

- Evaluation and assessment of your addiction
- A brief intervention
- Medication that you may need to manage withdrawal
- Visits to clinics
- Testing for drugs and alcohol
- Home visits from licensed professionals
- Family counseling
- Medications to help you reduce cravings
- Assistance with inpatient services like medical detox

If you want to figure out what sort of treatment plan you can sign up for with ACA, your best bet is to contact a local representative.

## **Supporting a Loved One Through Treatment**

Addiction treatment is difficult for everyone involved: the recovering alcoholic, their family, and oftentimes for the professionals who are working hard to ease them into their recovery.

However, as a loved one, you have a good deal of power to make this difficult time easier. There are a few things that you can do to make sure that your loved ones feel seen and respected during their recovery.

- Make sure that you treat them like equals. The worst thing that you can do to a recovering alcoholic is make them feel lesser than you. When talking about the issue, ask them how they're feeling or how their day is going - try to refer to the alcoholism as little as possible. If you have had any experience with addiction yourself, make sure to relate.
- Offer as much help as you can without being an enabler. For example, perhaps you could offer them a bed to stay while they try to distance themselves from alcohol. Offer them a ride to their rehab center or their meetings.
- Give them your undivided attention and encourage them to express their feelings. Sometimes all that they'll need is a chance to openly express themselves and feel heard and understood.
- If they do relapse, don't be too harsh on them. Acknowledge that relapse is a part of recovery and remind them why they wanted to sober up in the first place.
- Encourage them to find new hobbies or activities to enjoy. This will help them to take their mind off of alcohol. Invite them to join you in your own hobbies. Play games, go for hikes, or watch movies together - anything that can help to distract them from the cravings that they might be experiencing.

Try to learn as much as you can about what they're going through. There are a couple of ways to do this.

- **Book learning.** You can study up about addiction and alcoholism so you can understand the physical and psychological stress that they're probably going through. However, if you do this, make sure not to act as if you know more about their alcoholism than they do. Even if this was the case, this would be perceived as condescending and most likely push them away from you.
- **Asking them.** You can only learn so much from books. Everyone's individual experience is going to be different, and you can only learn about what your loved ones are going through by asking them about it.

As long as you approach the situation with compassion and concern, you'll be able to help them out quite a bit. Remember to be optimistic and offer them a shoulder if they need it.

## **Recover and Rehab**

Call us now for a free 15 minute consultation!

1 (844) 228-4968