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# Understanding Alcohol Use Disorder (AUD)

Alcohol use disorder (AUD) is a disabling pattern of alcohol use with high rates of physical and emotional problems. Some of these include:

- Problems controlling drinking
- Always thinking about drinking
- Continuing to use alcohol even when it causes physical, emotional, social, and money problems
- Needing to drink more alcohol to get the same effect
- Having withdrawal symptoms when drinking is stopped

It's a disease in which a person is dependent on a drug—alcohol. AUD can be mild, moderate, or severe. But even a mild disorder can lead to problems. In the past, AUD was called alcohol abuse or alcoholism. AUD can harm a person's physical and mental health. It can also affect their behavior. And it can negatively impact personal and family relationships. AUD isn't a character flaw or a moral failure. It should be treated as a medical condition. It is best treated with a combination of behavioral change, support, and medicines. Relapses can occur. They are part of the disease.

## Effects of AUD

### Behavioral effects

Drinking is the main behavior of people with AUD. They develop a private relationship with drinking. They guard it. They give it their time, money, and focus. This may happen at the expense of family and friends. They lie for it and think about it all the time. They may risk losing their families for it. They may risk their lives for it. Despite the harm it causes, they can't control the drinking.

### Health risks

People with AUD are at high risk for health problems. These include heart disease and cancer. They also include mental illness. People with the disease may not heal from illness normally. Unless drinking is stopped, it can cause death. Death may result from organ failure, cancer, or common viruses. Death may also result from accidents or suicide.

### Physical effects

Alcohol can be like a poison to the body. It kills cells. Heavy drinking over a long time can greatly harm the body's organs. These can include the brain, heart, liver, and pancreas. Chronic drinking also harms the digestive tract. It can make the blood thin and unable to clot. This causes bruising and even fatal bleeding. It harms the immune system as well. This leaves the body at risk for serious disease.

### Psychological effects

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AUD can lead to a type of distorted thinking. One of the most common forms of this is denial. This is when the person denies that drinking is a problem. They may deny that any of the problems in their life are caused by drinking. They may blame others for problems they have.