

# Understanding Alcohol Addiction

Alcohol Addiction is a disease that affects millions of families and communities. The road to recovery starts with understanding addiction. Alcohol Addiction also called Alcohol Use Disorder is a medical condition defined as a desire or need to drink alcohol. Initially, the desire to drink is voluntary, but over time drinking begins to change the way your brain works making alcohol a need and not just a want.

Alcohol releases the hormone Dopamine in your brain. Your nervous system uses Dopamine to send messages between nerve cells. Dopamine makes you feel happy. So, people continue to abuse alcohol even though it negatively impacts their brains and bodies.

Long term alcohol use changes the way your brain communicates and causes intense cravings and makes it difficult to stop using alcohol. It leads to problems with memory, learning, decision-making and judgement. Alcoholics Anonymous asks its members to maintain their anonymity when speaking at the public level, so we are concealing Jen's identity.

*"Alcohol sort of took over my life, and so I had a lot of car accidents. I had a lot of one-night stands. I had a lot of situations that were dangerous that I had gotten myself into. And so it really did impact my ability to mature as a regular adult."*

The developing brain is particularly vulnerable to the effects of alcohol abuse. Underage drinking and alcohol use in young adults affects brain development and can cause long-lasting changes in brain structure and how it works.

Some people have an increased risk of being addicted to alcohol. Risk factors for alcohol abuse include genetics, a family history of alcohol abuse, drinking at an early age, mental health conditions such as depression and post-traumatic stress disorder, and a history of trauma including in childhood.

If you are listening to this you have already taken the first step and noticed something is not working, now take the next step and get the support you need and deserve.

*"The disease of alcoholism will tell you that you have to do it by yourself. The disease of alcoholism will want you to isolate, and try and figure it out on your own. But that will keep you stuck. That will keep you sick ... So, it's really vital to get honest with somebody who can point you in the right direction, and lead you to the help that you need."*

Overcoming alcohol addiction is an ongoing process, which can include setbacks. But your addiction can be managed with treatment and a good support system in place. The road to recovery is not easy, but a healthier life is possible.

*"Having a strong support system is one of the critical factors that can make the difference between staying in recovery or not staying in recovery."*

For more information, visit [niaaa.nih.gov](http://niaaa.nih.gov).