



Alcohol Use Disorder (Alcoholism)



Overview

This is a mental and physical need to drink alcohol. We also call it "alcohol dependence." It makes you want to drink alcohol even when it hurts you and others. This can cause chaos in your life. It can cause health problems.

Causes

We don't know exactly why people have this disorder. It may be linked to your genes and your brain. Social and environmental factors may play a role, too. Over time, drinking a lot of alcohol can change your brain. It can alter the parts that handle pleasure, judgment and control. You may begin to crave alcohol. These cravings may be mild at first, but they can get worse and worse.

Symptoms

As you become dependent, drinking begins to play a larger role in your life. You may need to drink more to feel the effects. You have a hard time limiting how much you drink. You may drink even when it's unsafe, like before you drive. Your relationships and your work may suffer. When you don't drink, you may feel withdrawal symptoms such as nausea, sweating and trembling. You may drink just to feel normal.

Complications

This can cause serious problems. It can lead to health issues such as liver disease and osteoporosis. It increases your risk for cancer. It can interact harmfully with medications. Alcohol use during pregnancy can cause fetal alcohol syndrome and increases the risk of birth defects. Using alcohol can cause you to engage in risky activities. It may ruin relationships and careers, and cause legal trouble. And, it increases your risk for suicide.

Treatment

Treatment may involve medications and talk therapy. Support groups and continued counseling can help. Your healthcare provider can create a plan that's right for you.

Actor portrayals in photos

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