

Alcoholism

Alcoholism is a disease

Alcoholism is a chronic, often progressive, disease that's characterised by a physical and psychological dependence on alcohol. It's sometimes also known as alcohol dependence.

Alcohol dependency may result from a genetic predisposition, mental illness, sustained heavy and abusive drinking or a combination of these factors. Recent research in genetics and neuroscience has identified certain genetic characteristics that are believed to be related to alcohol dependence. Scientists are continuing to research the relationship between genetics and alcoholism. There's no known cure for alcoholism, though many people can stay sober for the long term with commitment and effort. However, before people with alcoholism can start recovery, they have to admit that they have a drinking problem.

Alcoholism is characterised by a physical and psychological dependence on alcohol

Some people have very serious problems with alcohol without having all the signs and symptoms of alcoholism.

Warning signs

Here are some of the signs that someone might have a drinking problem (it's not a complete list by any means).

- Feeling a compulsion to drink
- Being unable to limit how much they are drinking at any particular time
- Needing to drink greater amounts of alcohol to feel the desired effect
- Experiencing physical withdrawal symptoms (nausea, sweating, shallow breathing and shaking) if they don't drink alcohol
- Needing to drink to feel good or normal
- Losing interest in activities, hobbies or relationships
- Experiencing blackouts – forgetting what happened when they were drunk
- Drinking alone or hiding their drinking from others

The World Health Organisation has developed the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT) instrument which is a helpful assessment tool for physicians to assess the likelihood of a patient's alcohol dependence. The AUDIT questionnaire can be used to determine the degree of risk associated with drinking.

take action

If you do experience any of these signs or symptoms – or know someone else who does – please contact a doctor, healthcare professional or alcohol treatment organisation for help. Such professionals and organizations may assist with counselling, prescription medications and other support.

talkingalcohol.com

is a site dedicated to helping people make informed choices about alcohol

other websites

These sites contain further information that you may find useful. However, SABMiller is not responsible for the content of these sites.

- Adult Children of Alcoholics World Service Organization, Inc.
www.adultchildren.org/
- Alcoholics Anonymous Worldwide
www.aa.org/
- Narconon, Johannesburg, South Africa
www.stopaddiction.co.za/P20050305144452740.htm

- New South Wales Government Alcoholinfo, Dependence, Disease and Treatment
www.alcoholinfo.nsw.gov.au/dependence__disease__and_treatment
- NHS Choices (UK), Caring for an Alcoholic
www.nhs.uk/Livewell/alcohol/Pages/Caringforanalcoholic.aspx
- NIAAA, Collaborative Studies on Genetics of Alcoholism (COGA)
www.niaaa.nih.gov/ResearchInformation/ExtramuralResearch/SharedResources/projcoega.htm

