



# Alcohol and addiction

One of the most common addictions people have is an addiction to alcohol, or alcoholism. In the UK, people in treatment for alcoholism make up the largest group of those in treatment for addictions.



# Symptoms of an alcohol addiction

An addiction to alcohol can present itself in mild, moderate, or severe ways. While the following list is not exhaustive, some of the signs and symptoms can include:

- An inability to limit alcohol intake
- Having a desire to reduce intake but feeling unable to do so
- Experiencing a strong craving to consume alcohol
- Feeling that you can't face life without alcohol
- Continuing to consume alcohol even when you know it's damaging various areas of your life
- Failing to fulfil obligations at work due to a preoccupation with alcohol
- Impaired relationships with family and friends
- Tendency to drink in secret and hide drinking activities
- Reduced time engaging in constructive activities outside work due to alcohol consumption
- The experience of withdrawal symptoms including shaking, sweating, nausea, and cognitive impairment when you don't drink

## Social acceptance

Drinking alcohol is normalised in society and there are obviously connections between social situations and alcohol.

One effect of drinking alcohol is that it can lead to an increase in beta-endorphins. These neuropeptides can lead to an increase in feeling happy and relaxed in social situations.

What the science tells us is that 1 or 2 drinks will facilitate this mild euphoric effect, while the same is not true for larger quantities of alcohol. As we drink more the result is an increase in sedative and hypnotic effects and can lead to an increase in anxiety levels rather than a decrease.

Obviously, the impact on individual brains varies from person to person. For example, some will experience significant pleasure when consuming alcohol, while others will not. Crucially, if you are a person who does experience the hedonic effects of alcohol, the social acceptance of alcohol consumption can sometimes present barriers to the acknowledgement that maybe an addiction is developing.

## Being honest with yourself

The hardest part of dealing with alcoholism is recognising you have a problem. It is not uncommon for those with alcoholism to avoid the truth and even tell lies to perpetuate their addiction.

If you have a loved one who you feel is in need of help, seek professional advice about what constructive steps you can take.

## When to seek help.

If you feel that you are becoming dependent and need alcohol in order to make it through the day or week, if you are thinking about alcohol frequently or if you are conscious that your drinking is having a negative impact on your life, that is the time to seek help. You don't need to wait for things to become severe, in fact, early intervention is going to be your best option.

There are numerous treatment options available including rehab, the 12-step programme of Alcoholics Anonymous, drug therapy, counselling, nutritional therapy, and a variety of online support options. It's never too early to reach out for help and support.

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The earlier the signs of addiction to alcohol are recognised, the earlier something can be changed. Self-awareness involves deep personal honesty. It comes from asking hard questions.