

Alcohol Concerns Dependence and Abuse

How can you tell if you or someone you know has a problem with alcohol? Whether you're concerned about your own well-being or someone else's, knowing the signs and symptoms of alcohol-related problems can be the first step toward getting help.

Alcohol dependence, also known as alcoholism, has four main symptoms:

- *Craving*: A strong need for alcohol—counting the hours or minutes until the next drink.
- *Loss of control*: Being unable to limit your drinking on any given occasion.
- *Physical dependence*: Having withdrawal symptoms, such as nausea, sweating, shakiness and anxiety, when you try to stop drinking.
- *Tolerance*: Needing to drink more and more alcohol to feel its effects.

Alcoholism is a long-lasting disease that gets worse over time. Although alcoholism cannot be cured, it can be treated. Alcohol dependence can cause problems with your health, relationships and job. But keep in mind that problems can result from alcohol even if you are not an alcoholic.

Alcohol abuse occurs when someone repeatedly has too much to drink, causing health or social problems. Alcohol abuse is different from alcoholism—it does not include a strong craving for alcohol, loss of control or physical dependence. Some signs of alcohol abuse to watch out for are:

- Ignoring major work, school or home duties
- Drinking in dangerous situations, such as while driving
- Repeated alcohol-related legal problems, such as being arrested for driving drunk or physically hurting someone while drunk
- Continuing to drink even though problems are made worse by alcohol

Keep in mind that for some people no amount of alcohol is safe. Do not drink if you:

- Are a woman who is pregnant or trying to become pregnant
- Plan to drive
- Take certain medications, including some over-the-counter medications (check with your doctor or pharmacist)
- Have a medical condition that can be made worse by drinking (check with your doctor)
- Are a recovering alcoholic

Admitting that help is needed for an alcohol problem may not be easy. But keep in mind that the sooner a person gets help, the better are his or her chances to fully recover.

Need someone to talk with? Looking for helpful suggestions? United participants can call Care24 any time, 24 hours every day to speak with compassionate professionals.

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