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## *Take Control of ALCOHOL*

By Claire Nash

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## **Please Read This **FIRST****

This book is a lay-person's overview of a complex and important subject, based on the author's experience and research.

You must consult a qualified medical practitioner about any questions or concerns which you have about this subject. They know you and also have access to the latest research and assistance.

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## **Part-I: Introduction**

### **1. Alcoholism - An Overview**

Alcoholism is the cause of death of about 100,000 people a year in the U.S.A..

The U.S.A. Federal Government spends around \$166 billion on the indirect and direct health costs of alcoholism.

The health of up to half of the adult U.S. population is affected by alcohol, causing it to be a leading factor affecting the health of the nation.

Alcohol lowers our body's resistance and immune system, so alcoholics contract infections like bacterial pneumonia relatively easily and this leads to more complex, dangerous and expensive medical problems.

Alcoholism is dependence on alcohol consumption along with an uncontrollable desire for alcohol which leads to serious physical, emotional, and social problems.

Alcoholism does not have one definite cause. Contributing factors include;

- Affluence
- Easy availability of alcohol
- Social and peer pressures and
- Emotional disturbances.

The negative effects of alcohol can include extensive damage to your body's organs, including your heart, liver, kidney and brain to the point of causing death.

Alcoholism is also a major factor in serious motor vehicle accidents, relationship problems and break-ups, assaults and even suicide.

Alcoholism is on the rise among teenagers and even younger children. They see drinking alcohol as a way to acceptance with their peers and fear alienation from their friends if they don't 'join in'.

Dependence on alcohol is extremely dangerous because it reduces the person's self control and is a major cause of;

- x broken homes and relationships
- x financial setbacks due to loss of employment
- x stealing to get money for alcohol
- x irresponsible driving causing serious accidents and
- x loss of self-respect and esteem with friends and colleagues.

But there are many valuable treatments and ways to reduce the ongoing effects and dependence on alcohol. Improvements do not come easily; withdrawal periods are stressful and difficult for the alcoholic and immediate family members.

Treatments include detoxification programs with group counselling and psychotherapy for combating psychological issues and physical ailments. Different therapies supervised by experienced medical practitioners like



nutritional therapy, aversion therapy and regulated abstinence programming can turn around the lives of alcoholics and give them back their families and friends.

Children of alcoholic parents experience serious trauma and sometimes grow up to be very rebellious. They may suffer from several abnormal conditions after they grow up. Such children have Adult Children of Alcoholics Syndrome.

Alcoholics who quit taking alcohol are recovering alcoholics and must focus on retaining their control over the temptation of alcohol which is everywhere in modern society.

Alcoholics Anonymous and Al-Anon are two of the most well-known and respected philanthropic organizations which contribute to the welfare and well-being of alcoholics, their children, and families. They support rehabilitation programs and offer moral support in times of extreme crisis. Most members of such associations are past alcoholics so they are best able to understand and visualize traumas and agonies of alcoholism.

Some ways to counteract the growing tide of alcoholism is through social education of the whole population, limiting advertisements especially those that might be particularly attractive to very young people, increasing the cost of products that contain alcohol and extensive involvement of federal organizations to curb and reduce alcoholism.

## 2. Is Alcoholism a Disease or a Vice?

Alcoholism is an uncontrolled desire to drink alcohol. Some life experiences which may increase the attraction include emotional setbacks, physical disabilities, habits or pressure to conform with the accepted practices of your colleagues and friends or people you want to socialize with.

Whatever be the reason, drinking alcohol beyond permissible limits is alcoholism. So, what are permissible limits? There cannot be just one set limit for everyone – we're individuals.

Many medical experts define alcoholism as a psychological abnormality or physiological disease in a person. If it is a psychological shortcoming, you can control your addiction largely but not if it is any physiological deficiency. Other research presents alcoholism tries to differentiate between people who drink heavily to overcome past or present emotional problems and those who drink due to a genetic disorder with the latter said to be suffering from symptoms of alcoholism disease. And there are many further variations.

### Medical Terminology of Alcoholism

There is no single universal definition of alcoholism accepted right across medical circles. You cannot take a blood test to determine your alcoholic tendencies. Blood tests only indicate alcohol levels in your blood and not your inclination to consume alcohol.

Different medical professionals and researchers favor various yardsticks to diagnose alcoholism in individuals. Medical practitioners diagnose you as an alcoholic according to the defining symptoms which they, based on their

experience and research, believe are most significant indicators of alcoholism, such as the presence of diagnosable physical diseases which are known to be due to consumption of alcohol like cirrhosis of liver, etc.

To understand alcoholism, you need to know the views of both camps; those to whom alcoholism is a disease and the other, equally respected researchers and practitioners, who believe that alcoholism is not a disease.

### **One View; 'Alcoholism is a disease'**

The supporters of this view portray alcoholism as a genetic disorder in some persons whom, they say, can consume liquor in larger quantities with higher tolerance levels in the initial stages. After a certain point, the patient's tolerance levels fall drastically.

Drinking becomes a habit which brings serious problems into their lives. These practitioners believe that the result is likely to be death or lunacy. The American Medical Association (AMA) also views alcoholism as a disease because it satisfies all the determining criteria of disease-symptoms; persistent, progressive, treatable, and with a strong chance of relapse.

The National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence and the American Society of Addiction Medicine also fully support this definition and argument.

### **The Other View; 'Alcoholism is not a disease, but a vice'**

Supporters of this view questioning the meaning of word 'disease' itself. 'Disease is a pathological condition of a part, organ, or system of an organism resulting from various causes, such as infection, genetic defect, or environmental stress, and characterized by an identifiable group of signs or

symptoms' according to The American Heritage Dictionary. However, even the common cold does not fall under this definition of disease. A layman can immediately understand meaning, implications, and effects of a disease such as cancer. But, the same man cannot be clear about alcoholism.

Alcoholism refers to unacceptable levels of drinking and lacks any identifiable characteristics which are common to every person that suffers from it. It will affect your family and your behavioral patterns but they will not be identical in degree or effect with the experiences of other people who are affected by alcohol. While it is believed that you can control the extent and some effects of alcoholism through your actions, the occurrence and impact of other diseases are due to genetic or environmental factors over which you cannot exercise much, if any, control.

While there is such a wide division of opinion among experienced researchers and practitioners in this area, it is best to not let ourselves be side-tracked by theories and just concentrate on measures to combat alcoholism as it affects us or those close to us.

## **Part-II: Understanding Alcoholism**

### **3. What is Alcoholism?**

It is difficult to define alcoholism. The term is used for both dependence on alcohol and the abuse of alcohol.

It causes many unfavorable and difficult situations and consequences. A publication of the American Psychiatric Association, 'Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders', defines alcoholism as incorrect usage of alcohol.

Alcoholism is sometimes referred to as problem drinking - drinking more than is safe, such as half a dozen drinks in a short period or drinking before driving.

The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) defines alcoholism much the same - 'A disease that includes alcohol craving and continued drinking despite repeated alcohol-related problems, such as losing a job or getting into trouble with the law.' Alcoholism is a chronic disorder involving consuming high levels of alcoholic beverages than we can handle.

It leads to total disruption of all relationships, responsibilities, and health. Unsafe intake of alcohol leads to further problems - alcohol dependence and alcohol abuse. Alcohol intake is like abuse of any other drug - heroin, cocaine, marijuana, sedatives, nicotine and anti-anxiety drugs.

Such alcoholic tendencies are reported to be higher in males than in females.

### ***Alcoholism and Alcohol Abuse - Are they different?***

Alcoholism is a dependence on alcohol, a lack of control on drinking and abnormal craving for alcohol at any cost and all times. Alcohol abuse is a part of the process of alcoholism, leading to serious health and relationship problems.

### **Causes of Alcoholism**

There is no single cause for alcoholism.

- Alcoholic parents may increase the chance that their children could abuse alcohol.
- Some scientists report research which may indicate genetic causes for alcoholism but, at this point, cannot pinpoint any particular gene or its influence on alcoholism.
- Psychological factors like depression, conflicts in relationships, seeking relief from anxiety and tension and low self-esteem push some people toward alcoholism.
- Social contributors include easy availability and acceptance of alcohol consumption, lifestyles and peer pressure.

### **Consequences of Alcoholism**

Alcoholism, like drug addiction, has far-reaching consequences on every sphere of human life.

### *Physical consequences*

Alcoholism gradually attacks all body systems, crippling their functioning. It affects the nervous system of your body leading to increased levels of normal emotions like tension, anxiety and inhibitions. It destroys inner lining of gastrointestinal tracts and stomach causing vomiting, nausea and bleeding.

Many sufferers have memory blackouts, unstable walking and impaired sense of balance. You lose your ability to judge or concentrate on anything.

Your body cannot absorb vitamins properly, leading to poor levels of essential nutrients in your body. The liver and pancreas suffer immense damage and alcoholic hepatitis and cirrhosis are often the result.

Heart functioning becomes irregular and the incidence of high blood pressure, clotting disorders, heart attacks, anemia, low blood sugar levels, and high fat content in the blood is markedly increased.

Sexual dysfunction, leading to cessation of menstruation in women and erectile dysfunction in men, is another consequence.

Alcohol consumption in pregnant women is believed to lead to malformation of the fetus with several behavioral problems, some of which are life-long impairments.

Severe alcoholism can lead to muscular malfunctioning and cancer in vital organs with severe, even fatal, consequences.

### *Social Consequences*

Social consequences of alcoholism include unemployment, problems at home, souring of all relationships at all levels, higher incidence of traffic fatalities and other problems with police and other authorities.

Alcoholism can be a major factor in violent crimes, date rape, child abuse and teen pregnancy. It also causes immense havoc in the lives of your loved ones.

The alcoholic completely disassociates themselves from the real world.



## 4. Stages of Alcoholism

Alcoholism is a self-inflicted illness, which affects people everywhere without regard to language, sex, creed, education, religion, or caste. It is usually slow in the early stages but a negative outcome is inevitable unless strong action is taken by the sufferer and those around them. However, denial is a symptom common to all sufferers and must be overcome for recovery to be possible and lasting.

Alcoholism sets in when occasional drinking becomes a habit. Prolonged drinking causes resentment and unhappiness all around and can ruin you totally.

Alcoholism normally passes through four stages with specific symptoms. Denial is prevalent in all the stages.

### First Stage

The initial stage is where you are amazed at the quantity of alcohol you can consume. That is often more than your friends and companions and leads you to boast about your capacity. When you drink to excess, you imagine yourself to be wealthy, go on careless spending sprees and are carefree in showing off your achievements.

### *Symptoms*

1. Drinking "to relax".
2. Drinking to relieve you of all tension, stress or mental fatigue.

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