



Guide to Alcohol Addiction & Recovery

There are so many classifications of drinkers out there—social drinker, binge drinker, heavy drinker, problem drinker. Those classifications have their place, but many people just want to know one thing: Am I an alcoholic?

To learn more about treatment for alcohol addiction, call **720.891.4657**.



www.theraleighhouse.com

The Big Question: Are You an Alcoholic?

There are so many classifications of drinkers out there—social drinker, binge drinker, heavy drinker, problem drinker. Those classifications have their place, but many people just want to know one thing: Am I an alcoholic?

Drinking alone can be a bad sign. So can experiencing blackouts. Having eight drinks on a Saturday night is definitely not the best thing for your health. But, while these can all be signs of alcohol abuse, they do not prove that someone is physically and psychologically addicted to alcohol.

Part One: What Makes a Person an Alcoholic?

Some people describe it as feeling that they have crossed a line and are unable to live without alcohol. Others are confronted by friends or family who are concerned for them. But one of the best ways to know if you're dependent on alcohol is to be honest with yourself and look for these three signs.

3 Signs You Have an Alcohol Problem:

- 1) You cannot quit drinking or control how much you drink. Moderate drinkers can do this. Even problem drinkers can do this. Alcoholics cannot.
- 2) You have to drink more to get the same effect. And that leads to more damage to both your physical and mental health.
- 3) You crave alcohol and suffer withdrawal symptoms when you stop drinking. Symptoms can range from mild anxiety to delirium tremens (also called DTs) that involve confusion, rapid heartbeat, fever and, in severe cases, even death. (Many people don't know that alcohol is one of the more dangerous drugs to detox from without help.)

If those signs describe you, you might be telling yourself that it really is time to buckle down and cut back. But, here's the thing, if you had diabetes or asthma, would you try to treat yourself? Of course not. What you would do is find someone qualified to help you. Alcoholism is a disease that must be treated.



Part Two: Effects of Alcohol Addiction on the Brain & Body

Effects of Alcohol Addiction on the Brain

Many of us know what it feels like to drink too much. Maybe you danced on a table. Or fell asleep in a corner. Or woke up the next day with a bad headache.

It's pretty obvious that alcohol has an immediate effect on the brain. But what are the longer-lasting effects? Is it really something to worry about?

According to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, the answer is yes—if you are a heavy drinker. Most people who have been abusing alcohol for an extended period of time will experience what the NIAAA calls “mild to moderate impairment of intellectual functioning as well as diminished brain size.”

The NIAAA goes on to say that the most common brain impairments caused by alcohol are related to visuospatial abilities (things like assembling a piece of furniture based on illustrated instructions) and higher cognitive functioning (such as the ability to organize a plan and change it as needed).

The good news? If alcohol is abstained from, this kind of impairment is reversible over a period of several months to one year.

The NIAAA does warn, however, that a small proportion of the heaviest drinkers may develop irreversible brain-damage syndromes, such as Wernicke-Korsakoff syndrome, a disorder in which one is incapable of remembering new information for more than a few seconds.

Dopamine and the Results of Alcoholism

It's true that alcohol can take the edge off or boost your mood. That's because of the rush of dopamine that is produced by a glass of beer, vodka or Chardonnay.

After a certain point, however, your brain adapts to this constant flood of feel-good chemicals by producing less dopamine or eliminating dopamine receptors in your brain. The result? Your brain's natural ability to experience pleasure has been compromised. What's more, you need to drink more and more to achieve the same effects from alcohol.

Once a person stops drinking and gets over the physical effects of withdrawal, they're still likely to feel less than their best until the brain begins to rebuild. How long does that take? There's a lot of research still being done on this, but experts say it can vary from a few weeks to up to a year, depending on the severity of addiction and other factors.

It would be nice if sobriety were as simple as getting over a week or so of feeling lousy. Unfortunately, recovery is more complex than that. It's not just physical, mental, emotional or social. Rather, it's a mix of all of the above. Recovery does take work. And it can be tempting to simply keep drinking, which will only make things a little bit worse every day. With the right help, you can stay on track and feel a bit better every day. Before you know it, you'll be able to enjoy all of the challenges, joys and everyday pleasures of life again.

Effects of Alcohol Addiction on the Body

Heavy drinking can also have a significant impact on your physical health—even if you never cross the line into addiction.

The most well-known of these is liver damage. Fatty liver, also called steatosis, is the earliest and most common form of alcohol-related liver disease. It's basically what happens when there is too much fat inside of liver cells, making it harder for the liver to function. Fatty liver can occur fairly quickly—even within a few weeks—in people who drink heavily.

Cirrhosis, the most severe form of alcohol-related liver disease, happens when scar tissue replaces normal tissue. It occurs in about 10 to 20 percent of heavy drinkers after years of excessive alcohol consumption.

Physical Effects of Alcohol Addiction

In addition to liver damage, there are many ways that heavy drinking can damage the body.

- The circulatory system. Heavy drinkers have a higher risk of heart-related issues, including heart disease, heart attacks, high blood pressure, stroke and heart failure.
- Cancer. Heavy drinkers have a higher risk of certain cancers, including mouth, breast, throat, liver and colon.
- The pancreas. Around seven out of 10 cases of chronic pancreatitis are due to long-term heavy drinking.
- The digestive system. Heavy drinking can, over time, damage the tissues in your digestive tract, which can prevent your intestines from absorbing nutrients, leading to malnutrition. Heavy drinking can also cause gassiness, bloating and diarrhea.
- Reproductive health. Heavy drinking can lead to erectile dysfunction in men and also infertility in women.
- The skeletal and muscular systems. Long-term alcohol abuse may result in thinner bones, putting one at risk for fractures. Drinking alcohol can also lead to muscle weakness.
- The immune system. Heavy drinking can weaken the immune system. Pneumonia and tuberculosis are more common among those who abuse alcohol.



The bottom line? While science continues to debate the merits of moderate drinking, there is universal agreement that heavy drinking is bad for your body and your mind—and puts you at risk for the devastating effects of alcohol addiction.

Part Three: How to Help an Alcoholic Friend or Family Member

Your loved one is struggling with addiction to alcohol but refuses to admit it or discuss it. So, day after day, you must sit by and watch things get worse. You feel powerless and scared. But, mostly, you feel desperate to help.

It's true that you can't force someone to go to rehab (except under very rare circumstances when a court order is issued). But there are steps you can take to lay the groundwork for rehab and recovery, as well as a healthy future relationship with your loved one.

Keep in mind, that just because your loved one has refused to get help now, doesn't mean he or she will always do so. Alcoholism is a disease that keeps taking from its victim. It's very likely that your friend or family member will reach a point when they're ready to change. And, when they do, you'll be ready to help.

How to Support an Alcoholic: What to Avoid

Your adult son calls. His rent is due and he's out of cash and needs a "loan." Your sister texts you. She needs a ride to work because she's lost her license. Your best friend knocks at your door. He needs a place to stay.

It's tempting to help in all of these situations. But when deciding what help to offer an alcoholic, there's one simple question to ask yourself: Would your loved one need this help if he or she were not drinking?

If the answer is no, then you should not help, because it would be enabling him or her to continue drinking without consequences.



Avoid Guilt Trips

We all know that life isn't fair and that's particularly true when dealing with an alcoholic. Your loved one is causing you extreme pain and, yet, the worst thing you can do is to react emotionally. Try to remember that it isn't your loved one doing this to you. It's the disease.

Here's an example. Your adult son never showed up on Christmas which, of course, ruined the day. Your first instinct is to, perhaps tearfully, let him know that he ruined the day and ask how he could have done this to you.

That's a perfectly natural reaction. But it won't help.



Here's what your son might be hearing: My parents are mad at me again. They don't understand the pain I'm going through and what my life is like. They only care about their perfect Christmas. They don't care about me.

You just gave your son an emotional out. Now, he's reacting to your reaction and can forget all about the fact that he missed Christmas. In his mind, you just gave him a really good reason to have a drink.

What???. (Remember, life isn't fair, especially when addiction is involved.)

Your loved one made the initial decision to drink and to drink too much. You may never know exactly how that spiraled out of control and what part genetics and environment played. But that's water under the bridge. You want your loved one to see a new future, not to keep reliving the past.



So avoid: "Boy, you've really messed your life up. You could have been done with college by now. When I was your age I had a job and two kids."

Instead try: "Imagine how much better your life can be. You have so much to offer the world and other people. You may not believe it now, but your life can be fun and good without alcohol."

Getting Ready for Change

You're not going to enable your loved one anymore, but you're not going to give up on him or her either. Pick your moments to ask about getting help—in a non-aggressive, non-emotional way.

In the meantime, spend time researching rehab programs. When your friend or family member is ready to go, you'll need to be ready to act.

None of this is easy. How can you look at your loved one and not break down? How can you avoid getting angry? How can you resist handing over \$20 when it's clearly needed so badly? How will you find the right rehab?

Many family members of alcoholics find great strength and encouragement from attending Al-Anon meetings, which are for family and friends of addicts. They've struggled with all of these same questions—and found solutions and strategies that they can share with you.



Part Four: Seeking Professional Help for Alcohol Addiction

Life can be so much better than this. At least a part of you believes that to be true. That's why you—or your loved one—has agreed to go to rehab to manage your alcohol addiction.

At The Raleigh House, we don't just believe that life can be better. We see it happen every day. And we know it can happen for you too. Yes, it will take effort. Yes, it will be hard at times. But it will be worth it.

So What is the Next Step?

There are a lot of details to work out. How will you or your loved one get here? How soon will you make the trip? How will your detox be handled? How will the finances work?

Because every person is unique, every situation is unique. At The Raleigh House, we're here to help you work through those details so that you can get to the good part—the journey of recovery.

What is Alcohol Rehab Like?

We'd love to tell you that it's easy, but it's not. To paraphrase the great Teddy Roosevelt: Nothing worth doing is easy.

The thing is, rehab is easier—way easier—than the path of addiction. It's easier than losing your job, having your children taken away from you or hearing that your liver is failing. It's easier than having nothing in your life that matters except alcohol.



Yes, it's hard work. But you'll be finding out what you want in life and how to get there. You'll be tackling challenges that have held you back and led to your problems with alcohol. You'll be planting the seeds for happiness and a full life.

How will all this happen? Through individual and group therapy sessions. By talking with doctors, nurses and other staff members. Through activities like art therapy. By getting moving (endorphins!) at yoga classes, in the pool or at the gym. While simply sitting outside in the sunshine and chatting with new friends about life.

It'll happen in intimate sessions with your personal therapist and at big gatherings like cookouts and group outings. The point is it will happen. You will begin to see a new—and better—way to live.

Part Five: Tools for Increasing the Effectiveness of Alcohol Treatment Programs

You've decided to seek treatment for alcohol abuse—and that's great, but it doesn't mean you're on cruise control. In fact, now is the time to take control of the wheel—and your future.

You've probably heard that a fair percentage of people end up relapsing after rehab. And that's true.

But it's also true that many people succeed. And there are a few key steps you can take to give yourself the best start towards a long and lasting recovery.

Step 1: Choose Your Treatment Program Carefully

Many people think that getting sober is just a question of getting over the physical aspects of withdrawal. If that were true, just about any treatment program could get the job done.

The truth is you need to tackle the issues that led to addiction. Is there a co-occurring condition such as depression or post traumatic stress disorder? Are you more genetically susceptible to addiction than others? How do you handle stressful situations? What are your triggers?

When choosing a treatment program, you'll want to ask if they have expertise in diagnosing and treating co-occurring conditions. Ask also about the staffs' experience and credentials.





Step 2: Remind Yourself Why You're in Treatment

You've decided you want more out of life than alcohol can give you. But, when you're in the midst of rehab, that can be easy to forget.

That's why it can be helpful to write your thoughts down—and review them frequently. Are you looking for better friendships? Better health? That wonderful clear-headed feeling you get when you know you're doing the right thing and taking care of yourself? Maybe you want the money to buy your own home. Or to feel like you have the respect of those around you. You could be looking forward to having more energy.

Whatever your reasons are, write them all down. Your list will be an important tool for you during the inevitable low points that come along during recovery.

Step 3: Build Relationships

We all know it's true: Loneliness and isolation are bad for us. To get the most out of rehab, you'll want to invest in relationships.

That starts with your primary therapist. In this relationship, you'll want to work to build trust. Your therapist can't help you if you don't make the effort to be open and honest. This is your chance to explore the mental aspect of your addiction. Any effort you invest will pay off.

At the same time, you'll have the chance to benefit from group therapy. You'll be part of a team—all working toward the same goal. This is a chance to experience fellowship, combat loneliness and learn more tools to use in your fight against addiction. It may take time for you to feel comfortable, but try to be an active participant.

Lastly, most treatment programs will also offer opportunities for family therapy. This is important because, when rehab is over, the last thing anyone needs is to go back to their old life full of resentment and issues. Family therapy offers a chance to clean the slate, allowing you a fresh start at your new life.

Step 4: Give Yourself Time

Chances are, you've beaten yourself up enough. Don't let rehab become another source of frustration and guilt. There will be ups and downs.

Accept that your mind and body are in recovery—and that it will take time. Look for a rehab program that gives you the opportunity to recover at your own pace (science suggests that at least 90 days is best). Does rehab work for alcoholics? Absolutely. The thing to remember is that you can't just show up (although that's a great start.) You need to invest in rehab, realizing that you're really investing in yourself.

A New Start at The Raleigh House of Hope in Denver, Colorado

At The Raleigh House, we believe that it's not enough to give someone a life without alcohol or drugs. The goal? To give you the tools needed to make a good life. When you walk through our doors, you'll be teamed up with a master's level trained therapist, who will work with you to plan and strategize your new life. Fill out our form or contact us today to learn more about the alcohol addiction treatment program at The Raleigh House.

As the founder of this addiction rehab center, and recovering addict myself, I want to help others who might be going through a situation like mine. That's why I'm inviting anyone who is currently struggling with addiction or who is in addiction recovery to reach out and ask for help. We are here.

~ Eric Lapp - Founder



Reach out for a confidential call: 720.891.4657