



The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Bowles Center for Alcohol Studies

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What is Alcoholism?

Alcoholism is a medical disease. It involves periodic or constant:

- impaired control over drinking
- preoccupation with alcohol
- use and abuse of alcohol in spite of adverse consequences
- distorted thinking, especially denial.

Alcoholism stems from genetic, environmental, and psychosocial factors. A high percentage of alcoholics have a genetic predisposition to the disease, although genetic predisposition can be overcome. Genetics are risk factors, not destiny.

People with the disease of alcoholism often need treatment, counseling, or medical attention to learn how to stop drinking and to live a healthier life.

For more information, see the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism and National Institute of Health's pamphlet [Alcoholism: Getting the Facts](#).

The NIAAA also offers [treatment referral information](#). In North Carolina, call the Alcohol and Drug Council of North Carolina at 1-800-688-4232 to find treatment services in your community.

What is Alcohol Abuse?

Alcohol abuse is also a serious medical and social problem, but is not the same as alcoholism. Alcohol abuse is the intentional overuse of alcohol, i.e., to the point of drunkenness. This includes occasional and celebratory over-drinking.

Not all people who abuse alcohol become alcoholics, but alcohol abuse by itself can have serious medical effects. Overuse of alcohol is considered to be:

- more than 3-4 drinks per occasion for women
- more than 4-5 drinks per occasion for men.

One drink equals one (12-ounce) bottle of beer or wine cooler, one (5-ounce) glass of wine, or one and a half ounces of liquor.

The NIAAA and NIH offer advice on [How to Cut Down on Your Drinking](#).

Alcoholism and Alcohol Abuse - [Costs](#) - [Benefits vs Risks](#)



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