Chronic Alcoholism

You have a problem with long-term (*chronic*) alcohol abuse, which is referred to as alcoholism. Alcoholism is a condition in which the body has an abnormal need (*dependence*) for alcohol. There are many types of drinking patterns among alcoholics. This may vary from daily use to occasional binges.
Chronic alcoholics often do not act drunk. They develop tolerance and can drink without showing the usual effects.

A chronic drinker is usually able to hold a job and maintain a family life. Only 3% of alcoholics are homeless. **However, there are many physical and emotional problems which can develop.** This may include:

- Damage to the liver, the heart, and the nervous system.
- Ulcers.
- Low blood sugar.
- High blood pressure.
- Increased chance of injury in a car accident.

Mental health problems common to alcoholics include:

- Anxiety and depression.
- Abusive behavior.
- Blackouts.
- Withdrawal symptoms.

One sign of chronic alcoholism is the onset of withdrawal symptoms when the body has not had enough alcohol. **These symptoms include:**

- Irritability.
- Trouble staying or falling asleep (*insomnia*).
- Seeing or hearing things that are not there.
- Not remembering certain periods of time (*blackouts*).
- **Seizures and the DT's (*delirium tremens*) in more severe cases.**

If you are concerned about your alcohol use, talk to someone who can help. Trying to quit on your own is not easy. It can be medically dangerous. This is especially true if you have been drinking heavily for a long time. Call your caregiver, Alcoholics Anonymous, or other alcoholic treatment programs for help.

AL-ANON and **ALA-TEEN** are support groups for friends and family members of an alcohol or drug dependent person. The people who love and care for the alcoholic or addicted person often need help too. For information about these organizations, check your phone directory or the internet. You can also call a local alcohol or chemical dependency treatment center.

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