



## PATHWAY CLINIC

*comprehensive treatment for mental health*

### **Alcoholism**

Sooner or later, almost everyone witnesses the out of control antics of a problem drinker. However, is problem drinking the same as alcoholism? Or, at what point does problem drinking become alcoholism?

In general, problem drinking qualifies as alcoholism when the person in question:

- Drinks compulsively
- Keeps drinking in spite of adverse consequences; and
- Gets upset when alcohol is not readily available

Not everyone who gets drunk is an alcoholic. Many people drink to experiment, act sociable, or to show off. Alcoholics, however, do not plan to get drunk; their drinking is an uncontrollable urge.

### **Alcoholics Suffer For Their Illness**

As their disease progresses, alcoholics need to drink more, and more often, just to feel normal. Increasingly they notice that once they start to drink, they can't stop. Yet they desperately want to keep from getting drunk, both to avoid embarrassment and to avoid unpleasant withdrawal symptoms such as trembling, irritability, nausea, and insomnia. They may try many different strategies to regain control over their drinking. No strategy works for long, however. Inwardly disgusted with themselves, alcoholics can fluctuate between anger and depression. Personal relationships deteriorate. Job performance suffers.

In addition, physical problems gradually develop. Alcoholics suffer from disturbing memory lapses called blackouts. Many eat poorly, because their irritated liver and inflamed digestive system give them heartburn, nausea, and gas. Sex drives dwindle. Insomnia robs them of needed sleep.

### **Alcoholism can have Serious Consequences**

People with advanced alcoholism drink almost constantly, have trouble keeping a job, relate poorly to other people, and may have self-destructive impulses. Some of the other serious physical consequences of late-stage alcoholism are:

- Convulsions
- Hallucinations
- Mental Confusion
- Partial Paralysis
- Cirrhosis of the Liver

The longer alcoholism continues without treatment, the greater the damage to the body. Untreated alcoholism is potentially fatal.

### **There is help...**

The good news is that alcoholism is treatable. With the right kind of help, most alcoholics can learn to lead a deeply satisfying life without alcohol.

If you have ever had the slightest suspicion that your own drinking might be turning into a problem, ask yourself only these three questions:

- Am I drinking more than I used to?
- Once I start drinking, am I sometimes unable to stop?
- Do I get irritated when I'm in a place where I can't drink?

Answering "yes" to even one of these questions suggests that your use of alcohol may be unhealthy or problematic.

When someone you love has a drinking problem, the crucial first step is getting that person to acknowledge that the problem exists. If your loved one is employed, find out if his or her workplace provides a benefit called "employee assistance." Such a program can provide a smooth, confidential link between a person who drinks too much and an appropriate treatment center.

If you think you or someone you know may have a drinking problem and you would like more information, Pathway Clinic can help. Please call 608-643-3663 or visit [www.PathwayClinic.com](http://www.PathwayClinic.com).