

SMOKING, AND ALCOHOL ADDICTION

A lot of people suffer from the consequences of smoking and drinking alcohol, which often leads to addiction. The word 'addiction' is a very powerful word in this sense, as it means the physical and psychological craving for a substance that develops into a dependency, and continues even though it is causing the addicted person physical, psychological and social harm. The disease of addiction is chronic and progressive; it can lead to extremely dangerous outcomes. This applies to both smoking, and alcohol addiction.

Smoking is not just a bad habit, but also a complex addiction. Experts believe that nicotine exerts its powerful addictive effects by altering two chemicals in the brain - dopamine and nor adrenaline - known as neurotransmitters. Within seven seconds of inhaling, a concentrated dose of nicotine is delivered directly to the brain, producing a nicotine "rush". Many smokers interpret this rush as one of pleasure, but in reality the pleasure is misunderstood. It only appears pleasurable, because it satisfies the craving created by the last cigarette. Over time, the smoker has become victim to the classic cycle of addiction.

The addiction of smoking leads to serious - at times even life-threatening - dangers to someone's physical health. In the USA, Canada and in most developed countries, smoking is the principal preventable cause of death and disease. For example, more than 400,000 deaths in the U.S. each year, are caused from smoking-related illnesses. Smoking greatly increases your risk for lung cancer and many other cancers. 22% of all male deaths and 11% of all female deaths are due to smoking. Giving up smoking can reduce the risk of developing many illnesses. Within 10 to 15 years of giving up, an ex-smokers' risk of developing lung cancer, is only slightly greater, than someone who has never smoked. Smoking increases the risk of suffering from heart diseases, stroke, other lung diseases and other respiratory illnesses. The body develops horrific reactions to the daily onslaught of smoking. It damages the blood vessels in the legs and arms for example, which lead to restricted circulation and even amputation of the limbs. Also, a smoker addict will eventually start getting eye irritations (which leads to blindness), foul smelling hair, hair loss and even start developing a loss of smell. All of these reactions are due to the dangerous chemicals cigarettes contain. One example of such a chemical is hydrogen cyanide, which can lead to headaches, nausea, dizziness and vomiting.

Whilst breaking the physical addiction to nicotine is hard, for many smokers breaking the habit - the psychological addiction - is much harder. This is mainly because smoking is likely to have become deeply ingrained over many years, and has therefore become an integral part of many emotional occasions. Sad or unhappy, bored or having to concentrate hard, happy and relaxed with friends - cigarettes are likely to have played a part in almost all of these situations. Some people smoke because of the way cigarettes are advertised, and where they are shown. Another reason why people start smoking, could be from living with people who smoke. Children who grow up with smokers take up the habit more frequently, than those

who grow up in a smoke-free home. Peer pressure is a major influence among teenagers in society. Young adults, who have friends who take up the habit, tend to start smoking as well.

As with all addictive behavior problems, it is very difficult for a person to acknowledge the existence of a drinking problem, and this means that people suffer for many more years than is necessary. It is often confused with recurring depression and high anxiety levels which are not relieved by conventional treatments, and a failure to identify the role of alcohol in these conditions often means a failure to refer for the correct treatment. Alcohol Dependency is by far the most common addiction, and is responsible for the deaths of many thousands of people every year. Government figures suggest that up to 9.7% of the UK population may be classified as dependent on alcohol.

There are various symptoms, some which are easily detected, that indicate one might have an alcohol addiction. These include: loss of control once drinking has started, and withdrawal symptoms ranging from mild tremors to frightening hallucinations. The condition is characterized by the fact that the sufferer - despite many attempts at control - finds that their drinking and the attendant consequences, continues to get worse over the period, and the dependent person's guilt, shame and remorse levels become increasingly more burdensome. Attempts to stop can result in withdrawal symptoms, which are relieved by taking more alcohol. Attempts at control ('just a couple of drinks won't hurt') almost always end in drunkenness, and things seem to get progressively worse. In extremes, suicide may seem the best option, as depression and severe anxiety coupled with feelings of hopelessness and helplessness, often accompany addiction to alcohol. The noticeable, or physical, changes in the effects of alcohol on the individual are detected over some time, such as malnourishment from not eating regularly, violent shakes, hallucinations, or convulsions when they don't have alcohol in their systems.

Many use alcohol to boost their self-confidence, and to relax around others. They may drink to forget their problems or to relieve stress, and often want just one more drink, even when their friends have stopped drinking. As the alcoholism progresses, they may begin having financial, work, or family problems. An alcoholic may get drunk without planning to, and make promises to limit or stop drinking, but fail. They may also lie about their drinking, sneak drinks at work or school, have blackouts, go through personality changes, or drink in the morning to cure a hangover.

It is quite evident that having a smoking or an alcohol addiction leads to a lot of problematic issues. The addict doesn't suffer alone, as friends and family around him or her, might also get involved. By knowing about the consequences of these addictions, one might be able to prevent oneself by getting into the vicious world of addiction.