Alcohol Abuse

Alcohol abuse is different from alcoholism, or being an "alcoholic", because it does not include a strong craving for alcohol, loss of control over drinking, or physical dependence on alcohol. Alcohol abuse is a pattern of drinking that results in at least one of the following situations:

- Failure to fulfill major work, school, or home responsibilities;
- Drinking in situations that are physically dangerous, such as while driving a car or operating machinery;
- Having recurring alcohol-related legal problems, such as being arrested for driving under the influence of alcohol or for physically hurting someone while drunk;
- Continued drinking despite having ongoing relationship problems that are caused or worsened by drinking.

Although alcohol abuse is different from alcoholism, many effects of alcohol abuse are also experienced by alcoholics. In addition, long term alcohol abuse can lead to alcoholism.

Alcoholism

Alcoholism, also known as "alcohol dependence," is a disease that includes four symptoms:

- Craving: a strong need, or compulsion, to drink.
- Loss of control: the inability to limit one's drinking on any given occasion.
- Physical dependence: withdrawal symptoms, such as nausea, sweating, shakiness, and anxiety, occur when alcohol use is stopped after a period of heavy drinking.
- Tolerance: the need to drink greater amounts of alcohol in order to feel buzzed or drunk.

A person's risk for developing alcoholism is based on their environment, including their lifestyle, family, friends, and culture, peer pressure, and even how easy it is to get alcohol.

With treatment and support, most people are able to recover from alcoholism. If you recognize any of these signs and symptoms in yourself, a friend, or a family member, approach them and share your concerns. Check out our tips for talking to a friend.