

## Classification

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1. There have been numerous attempts to classify alcoholism so the condition can be studied more systematically and strategies for treatment can be more realistic.
2. Classifications vary from E. M. Jellinek's gamma and delta alcoholics, to type I and Type II alcoholics, and finally to the disease concept of alcoholism.
3. Most current concepts look at addiction as a progressive disease that is caused by a combination of hereditary and environmental influences that are triggered and aggravated by the use of alcohol or other drugs.

## Long-Term Effects of Addiction (alcoholism)

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1. The liver is the organ most severely affected. Problems include a fatty liver, alcoholic hepatitis, and cirrhosis (which is the scarring of the liver and is eventually fatal).
2. Digestive effects include ulcers, diarrhea, pancreatitis, bleeding, and malnutrition.
3. Enlarged heart, high blood pressure, intracranial bleeding, and stroke are seen with frequent high-dose use.
4. Heavy drinking can cause large loss of brain cells since alcohol is toxic to all cells. Dementia is also a possible effect.
5. Alcohol can lower inhibitions and increase desire but as use increases, the physical ability to perform sexually is depressed.
6. In moderate to heavy drinkers, the chance of breast cancer in women as well as the chance of mouth, throat, and esophageal cancer increase in both men and women especially if they smoke.

## Alcohol Facts

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1. The majority of people in almost every country, except for Islamic countries, consume alcohol.
2. Two million people worldwide died last year due to alcohol.
3. Since the process of fermentation occurs naturally, alcohol was discovered by chance.
4. Over the centuries, alcohol has been used as a food, as a medicine, as a sacrament, as a reward, as recreation, and to cover emotional and mental problems.
5. Because alcohol causes the most health and societal problems, such as the Gin epidemic in England, its use has often been restricted or banned by almost every country but presently, because of demand, most restrictions have been overturned.

# Alcohol

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Educational Series*

Archbold Memorial

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## Alcoholic Beverages

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- Though there are hundreds of different alcohols, ethyl alcohol (ethanol) is the main psychoactive ingredient in all alcoholic beverages.
- When yeast is added to certain fruits, vegetables, or grains, they ferment into alcoholic beverages.
- When grains ferment, beer is the result. When fruits ferment, wine is the result. More highly concentrated spirits are distilled from the original fermentation of grains, some vegetables such as potatoes (vodka), and from wine.
- Most wine is 12% alcohol; most beer is 4% to 7% alcohol; and most liquors and whiskeys are about 35% to 50% alcohol.

## Absorption, Distribution, & Metabolism

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- Alcohol is absorbed, metabolized, and then excreted.
- The rate of absorption depends on body weight, sex, health, and a dozen other factors. Women usually absorb alcohol faster and get a higher BAC from the same amount drunk in comparison to men, so the effects on women are more damaging.
- About 2% to 10% of alcohol is excreted directly through the urine and lungs. The rest is metabolized and then excreted as carbon dioxide and water.
- Alcohol is metabolized at a defined continuous rate, so it is possible to determine what level of drinking will produce a certain blood alcohol concentration (BAC). A BAC of .08 defines legal intoxication in all 50 states.

## Desired Effects, Side Effects, & Health Consequences

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The six levels of alcohol use are:

1. **abstention,**
2. **experimentation,**
3. **social/recreational use,**
4. **habituation,**
5. **abuse, and**
6. **addiction (alcoholism)**

## Low- to Moderate-Dose Episodes

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1. Small amounts of alcohol or occasional episodes of intoxication episodes are usually not harmful and have some positive cardiovascular benefits, mostly for men.
2. The negative side of low to moderate drinking is accidents, unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases, or legal problems.
3. People who are pregnant or have preexisting physical or mental health problems, allergies to alcoholic beverages, high genetic/environmental susceptibility to addiction, and preexisting abuse problems should avoid alcohol.
4. Low-dose use can help digestion, promote relaxation, and slightly lower the risk of heart attacks or coronary artery disease (CAD).
5. The psychological effects depend on the mood of the drinker and the setting where the alcohol is consumed.
6. Since alcohol is disinhibitory, low-dose use can increase self-confidence, sociability, and sexual desire. The disinhibition is mostly due to GABA, an inhibitory neurotransmitter.
7. As the amount consumed increases, the initial desirable effects are often offset by unwanted side effects, such as physical and mental depression.

## High-Dose Episodes

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1. Intoxication is a combination of blood alcohol concentration, psychological mood, expectation, and drinking history.
2. As the blood alcohol concentration rises, effects go from lowered inhibitions and relaxation, to decreased alertness and clumsiness, to slurred speech and inability to walk, to unconsciousness and death.
3. Blackouts are caused by heavy drinking and marked by loss of memory even though the drinker is awake and conscious.
4. Hangovers are a withdrawal symptom of high-dose use.

## Chronic High-Dose Use

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1. About 10–12% of drinkers progress to frequent, high-dose use; 2–3 times more men than women have problems with alcohol.
2. Heredity, environment, and frequency of consumption help determine if a person will have a problem with their drinking.
3. Tolerance and tissue dependence occur as the body, especially the liver, attempts to adapt to ever-increasing amounts of alcohol.
4. Withdrawal after cessation of frequent high-dose use can be life threatening. Delirium tremens (DT's) is a life-threatening form of severe withdrawal that includes hallucinations and convulsions

## Addiction (alcoholism)

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1. About 10–12% of 140 million adult drinkers in the United States have developed addiction (alcoholism).
2. Just 20% of drinkers consume 80% of all alcohol.