

# At-Risk Drinking: Signs and Symptoms of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism

## Common Signs and Symptoms of Alcohol Abuse

- **Repeatedly neglecting your responsibilities at home, work, or school because of your drinking.** For example:
  - ▶ Performing poorly at work.
  - ▶ Flunking classes.
  - ▶ Neglecting your kids.
  - ▶ Skipping out on commitments because you're hung over.
- **Using alcohol in situations where it's physically dangerous.** Such as:
  - ▶ Drinking and driving.
  - ▶ Operating machinery while intoxicated.
  - ▶ Mixing alcohol with prescription medication against doctor's orders.
- **Having repeated legal problems because of your drinking.** For example, getting arrested for driving under the influence or for drunk and disorderly conduct.
- **Continuing to drink even though your alcohol use is causing problems in your relationships.** For example: getting drunk with your friends even though you know your spouse will be very upset. Or fighting with your family because they dislike how you act when you drink.
- **Drinking as a way to relax or de-stress.** Many drinking problems start when people use alcohol to relieve stress. For example, getting drunk after every stressful day or reaching for a bottle every time you have an argument with your spouse or boss.

## Signs and Symptoms of Alcoholism

Alcoholism involves all the symptoms of alcohol abuse. But it also involves another element: physical dependence. This includes tolerance and withdrawal.

- **Tolerance:** Tolerance means that, over time, you need more alcohol to feel the same effect. Do you drink more than you used to? Do you drink more than other people without showing obvious signs of being drunk?
- **Withdrawal:** As the effect of the alcohol wears off you may experience withdrawal symptoms. These include:
  - ▶ Anxiety or jumpiness.
  - ▶ Shakiness or trembling.
  - ▶ Sweating, nausea and vomiting.
  - ▶ Insomnia.
  - ▶ Depression.
  - ▶ Irritability.
  - ▶ Fatigue.
  - ▶ Loss of appetite.
  - ▶ Headaches.

Do you drink to steady the nerves or stop the shakes in the morning? Drinking to relieve or avoid withdrawal symptoms is a sign of alcoholism and addiction.

In severe cases, withdrawal from alcohol can be life-threatening. It can involve hallucinations, confusion, seizures, fever, and agitation. These symptoms can be dangerous. They should be treated by a doctor trained and experienced in dealing with alcoholism and addiction.

- **Loss of Control:** Drinking more than you wanted to. Drinking for longer than you intended. Drinking even though you told yourself that you wouldn't do it this time.
- **Desire to Stop—But Can't:** You have a constant desire to cut down or stop your alcohol use. But everything you have tried to stop and stay stopped hasn't worked.
- **Neglecting Other Activities:** You are spending less time on activities that used to be important to you (like hanging out with family and friends, exercising, hobbies or other interests) because of the use of alcohol.
- **Alcohol Takes Up Greater Time, Energy and Focus:** You spend a lot of time drinking, thinking about it, or recovering from its effects. You don't do many (or any at all) activities that don't revolve around the use of alcohol.
- **Continued Use Despite Negative Consequences:** You drink even though you know it's causing problems. For example, alcohol use is:
  - ▶ Making it hard to do your job
  - ▶ Damaging your marriage
  - ▶ Making your problems worse
  - ▶ Causing health problems

## Are You Wondering if You Have an Addiction to Alcohol?

This [short quiz](https://ncadd.org/learn-about-alcohol/alcohol-abuse-self-test) found at <https://ncadd.org/learn-about-alcohol/alcohol-abuse-self-test>, will help you decide if you or someone you know needs to find out more about alcoholism.

*Sources:*

*National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, National Institutes of Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, Inc., National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA)*