

(Health and Wellness) What is alcoholism? What is an alcoholic? Answers may vary

Written by Brandi Phillips
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What is alcoholism? What is an alcoholic? Depending on who you ask, the answer you receive may vary.

According to the Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, the definition of alcoholism is 1) continued excessive or compulsive use of alcoholic drinks; 2) poisoning by alcohol (esp. a complex chronic psychological and nutritional disorder associated with excessive and usu. compulsive drinking.

Alcoholic is also defined in this dictionary as 1a) of, relating to, or caused by alcohol: b) containing alcohol: 2) affected with alcoholism (alcoholically) or an alcoholic is a person affected with alcoholism.

These definitions are very broad and general. Let's analyze each of these definitions.

The first definition of alcoholism given is the continued excessive or compulsive use of alcoholic drinks. We all know that excessive and compulsive means different things to different people. For some, having seven drinks once or twice a week is an alcoholic. For others having one or two drinks seven days a week is excessive.

What about the term alcoholic – affected with alcoholism, or a person affected with alcoholism. The same thought process could be applied to this concept.

I personally would define an alcoholic as someone who drinks alcohol so much they cannot handle their business. This could mean missing appointments including work, family and religious obligations and personal endeavors and hobbies. I most definitely am not an expert in chemical dependency, although in my professional and personal life, I have dealt with alcoholics in many different capacities.

In doing some research on this topic, to come up with a definition, I found a definition that resembles the one I previously offered. Naomi Sims, author of *All About Health and Beauty for the Black Woman*, defines the concept of alcoholism as "... occurring when an individual so loses control of drinking that it seriously compromises physical and mental health, family life, social activities and employment."

She notes in her book that we (African Americans) account for fewer heavy drinkers than whites, but we are still plagued by alcoholism. Again, the term heavy drinkers can also be debated.

One last nutritional definition of alcoholism according to *Prescription For Nutritional Healing* by James F. Balch, M.D., and Phyllis A. Balch, C.N.C, is alcoholism is a chronic condition marked by dependence on ethanol (ethylalcohol). The dependence may be physiological, psychological, or a combination of the two. It is noted that one in 10 Americans who drink alcohol can be expected to have a problem with alcohol consumption.

Knowing this information, as a community, we must educate ourselves about the dangers of alcohol and recognize the signs of alcoholism in alcoholics.

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Here is a list of natural remedies to deal with alcoholism according to James F. and Phyllis A. Balch.

- Avoid alcohol (the obvious choice)
- Seek help from a person or persons knowledgeable about this disorder.
- Try a 10-day juice and cleansing fast to remove toxins from the body.
- Avoid saturated fats and fried foods.
- Don't consume refined sugar or anything that contains it. (Alcoholics sometime have concerns with sugar metabolism.
- Avoid stress and social situations where drinking is a primary activity.
- Get plenty of rest to allow your body to cleanse and heal itself.
- Most importantly take dealing with alcoholism one day at a time, as it is a complete lifestyle change.

Hopefully, this open up a discussion in the community regarding a consensus on what constitutes alcoholism. A consensus may not be possible with such a general definition, but recognizing it and dealing with it, is always the same.

Please consult a trusted chemical dependency professional if you or someone you know is dealing with alcoholism and it is affecting the quality of his or her life, both personally and professionally.

Brandi Phillips is a health and wellness professional, working with women, men and children to build a healthy community.