

**The Disease of Addiction: A Serious, Potentially Life Threatening Illness.
Chemical Dependency, Substance Abuse, Alcoholism, Drug Abuse and other
Addictions**

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Chemical Dependency is a treatable, potentially fatal and progressive illness that impacts millions of Americans. Drinking (or drugging) is a primary symptom of addiction and not the disease itself just as coughing is a symptom of tuberculosis. No one would say that the cough is a sign of weakness for the person with TB yet we make judgments about the alcoholic who has trouble with sobriety or the smoker who is having difficulty discontinuing tobacco. Some people have believed the fallacy that controlling drinking (or drugging) is all a matter of will power for the addict. It is no more under the control of the alcoholic than the illness of diabetes is under the control of the diabetic. Often by the time that the disease of addiction is diagnosed, the person no longer has a choice as to whether they will use alcohol or drugs. The point is long past. The person now has the disease of addiction. They can become responsible for how they live with the illness. Addiction does not usually get better by itself. If not treated, it will progress into predictable stages.

The alcoholic often has developed blinders that serve to reinforce their own denial concerning their level of addiction. As a rule, most alcoholics who are actively drinking do not believe that they have a problem, no matter how clearly the evidence around them contradicts this. Relationship conflicts, work problems and financial difficulties may overwhelmingly indicate that the addiction is out of control but the person with the addiction is able to deny any awareness of a problem due to the power of the disorder. Often the individual hits rock bottom before confronting the addiction, having lost a job, family and other cherished relationships in life. The first critical step to recovery is the recognition that a problem exists. Once that occurs, there are treatments that can help!

- Alcoholism is a disease, not a weakness.
- There are serious health consequences associated with chemical addictions.
- There are successful ways to treat the addictions.
- Not everyone who drinks is an alcoholic. Not all problem drinkers are alcoholics. An alcoholic who drinks cannot control their drinking.
- The earlier the treatment, the better.
- Families are impacted by the illness of chemical dependency.
- Recovery is a lifetime process.

Help is available. Call your Vanderbilt Work/Life Connections-EAP for assessment or treatment resources at (615) 936-1327.

- **To Learn More about the Times and Locations of A.A. Meetings in Middle Tennessee go to: <http://www.aanashville.org/>**
- **To Learn More about the Times and Locations of N.A. Meetings in Middle Tennessee go to: <http://www.nanashville.org/>**

- **To Learn More about Cocaine Anonymous go to:**
<http://www.ca.org/phones.html>

Most successful treatment programs are based on AA and the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. The Twelve Steps provide a guide for sober/clean living and AA is actually a learning school where addicts go to learn how to live a sober/clean life.

The 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol - that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics and to practice these principles in all our affairs.