

## Facts About Alcohol Use Disorder (AUD)

AUD is a medical condition characterized by the impaired ability or inability to stop drinking alcohol despite adverse social, occupational or health consequences.

### **AUD is a disease.**

When someone is suffering from AUD, the craving for alcohol can be as strong as the need for food or water. Individuals with AUD will continue to drink despite serious family, health, occupational or legal problems. Like many other diseases, AUD is chronic. The disease lasts a person's lifetime, meaning that long-term management is required to maintain sobriety. Relapse should be expected.

### **What are the risk factors?**

AUD cuts across gender, race and nationality. People from all walks of life can develop AUD. More than 14 million adults in the United States reported having AUD in 2019. The risk for developing AUD is partially influenced by how much, how often and how quickly a person consumes alcohol. Other factors can increase the risk of AUD including:

- A family history of AUD
- Drinking at an early age
- Exposure to trauma
- Mental health conditions



## Recovery is a journey. Help yourself or a loved receive the benefits of sobriety including:

- » The freedom to make choices
- » Improved relationships
- » Peace of mind
- » A healthier lifestyle

### **What are the symptoms of AUD?**

AUD should be diagnosed by a healthcare professional. A thorough medical exam will be performed to assess whether a person has AUD and to determine the severity of the disease. Generally, a provider will ask questions like the ones below to help determine whether a person has AUD.

In the past year have you:

- More than once attempted to reduce or stop drinking but couldn't?
- Wanted a drink so badly you couldn't think of anything else?
- Found that drinking—or being sick from drinking—often interfered with important aspects of your life such as caring for your home or family, or performing at your job or at school?
- Continued to drink even though it was causing trouble with your family or friends?
- More than once found yourself in dangerous situations during or after drinking (such as driving, using machinery, or having unprotected sex)?

## Is AUD inherited?

Research shows that the risk for developing AUD does indeed run in families. However, your friends, the amount of stress present in your life and the availability of alcohol are also factors that may increase your risk for AUD. But risk does not equal destiny. Just because AUD tends to run in families doesn't mean that a child of a parent with AUD will automatically develop the disorder as well. Some people develop AUD even though there is no prior family history of the disease. Knowing you are at risk is important because it allows you to take steps to protect yourself from developing AUD.

## Can AUD be cured?

AUD has no cure and is similar to other chronic illnesses such as diabetes or asthma in that the patient must manage their disease over the course of a lifetime. Relapse can still occur in someone with AUD even if that person has not consumed alcohol for a long time. To guard against relapse, individuals with AUD must continue to avoid all alcoholic beverages.



## Can AUD be treated?

There are several effective treatments for AUD. Treatment programs use both counseling and medications to help a person achieve sobriety. With support and treatment, many people can rebuild their lives. But just like any chronic disease, there are varying levels of success when it comes to recovery. Some people stop consuming alcohol and remain sober. Others have long periods of sobriety with bouts of relapse. Still others cannot stop consuming

alcohol for any length of time. The longer a person abstains from alcohol, the more likely they will be able to stay sober. Asking for help is a sign of strength.

## Do you have to be diagnosed with AUD to experience problems with alcohol?

No. AUD is only one type of problem and, in some cases, is the tip of the iceberg. Drinking alcohol beyond the recommended limits or risky drinking can be just as harmful. A person who does not have an AUD diagnosis can also experience some of the same problems including the inability to meet work, school or family responsibilities; drunk-driving arrests and car crashes; and alcohol-related medical conditions.

## What can you do if you think you have AUD?

First of all, remember you are not a bad person! Alcohol makes you feel depressed and lowers self-esteem, often resulting in self-destructive or worthless feelings. When you do things because of these feelings, it makes you feel even worse about yourself. It is important to seek help right away as AUD can add to the risk of personal tragedy, both socially and physically.

## Some helpful resources for alcoholism are:

- » Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) [www.SAMHSA.gov](http://www.SAMHSA.gov)
- » Alcoholics Anonymous contains educational information and telephone numbers for assistance in areas throughout the U.S. [www.aa.org](http://www.aa.org)
- » Al-Anon provides support for families and friends. [www.al-anon.org](http://www.al-anon.org)
- » Crisis - **1-800-273-8255**