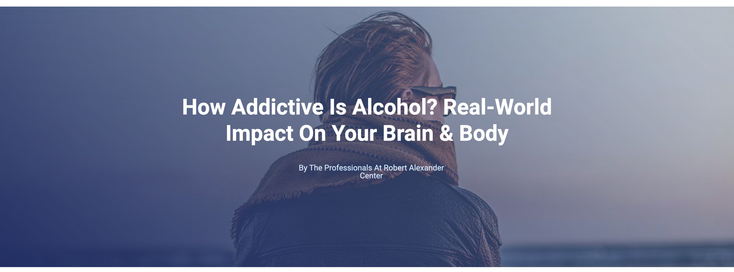

How Addictive Is Alcohol? Real-World Impact On Your Brain & Body

By The Professionals At Robert Alexander Center

Alcohol consumption plays various roles in different socio-cultural settings worldwide. In 2020 alone, alcoholic beverage production on the global market hit $1.49 trillion. Meanwhile, in tandem with these high figures is the impact on human life. The US records 95,000 annual deaths from excessive alcohol intake. A further breakdown means 261 deaths are recorded daily. Indeed, alcohol is addictive and has a real-world impact on your brain and body. Below is a discussion concerning the topic.

So How Addictive Is Alcohol?

Alcohol is a highly addictive substance because of its ability to interfere with pleasurable parts of the brain quickly. According to medical scientists, the nucleus accumbens is the pleasure center of the human brain. When people consume alcohol (regardless of the quantity), the 'happy hormone' known as dopamine surges in the nucleus accumbens, responsible for the light-headed sensation people experience after alcohol consumption.

However, after the alcohol content is excreted from the bloodstream, dopamine levels return to normal. On the contrary, this works differently for those who consume alcohol excessively. The brain learns to depend on it to maintain increased levels of intoxication. Alcohol 'fools' the brain into thinking the act of drinking is positive, and without it, pleasures will decrease. That explains why excessive drinkers repeat this action in hopes of recreating the initial feeling of being 'high.' Without treatment, this addiction is hard to break.

Disruption To Mood And Behavior

Due to its ability to interfere with the brain's communication channels, alcohol affects mood and behavior. Excessive drinkers (whether one-time or regular) experience a gradual decrease in what used to be swift thought processes. The inability to think, coupled with slurred speech, increases impulsive behaviors in drinkers or people who abuse alcohol.

According to research, an alcohol-induced brain tricks the neurotransmitters into thinking over-dependence on the drink is the only way to remain sane. Some heavy drinkers experience hallucinations and frontal lobe shrinkage of the brain. Unless the abuser is willing to seek help, any other solution may be unproductive.

Disruption To Brain And Body Coordination

The intoxicating effect on the brain causes an interruption to body coordination. It explains why a drunk person is unable to walk in a straight line or with a gait. Meanwhile, long periods of alcohol abuse, more often than not, result in tremors and shakes. This happens because the brain has learned to have an alcohol dependency, and reducing consumption causes the nerves in the limbs to go haywire.

Impact On The Body

Apart from the addictive hold on your brain, excessive alcohol consumption can ravage the rest of your body. This does not apply to the occasional wine drinker. On the contrary, someone who abuses alcohol will suffer the cumulative effects of ingesting alcoholic beverages over a period. And most of the impact on the body will be inflammatory-based conditions.

Heart

The heart is made of strong muscles responsible for filtering and pumping blood to the entire body. However, long periods of alcohol abuse cause drooping of the heart muscle. In medical terms, this is known as Cardiomyopathy. This condition dramatically increases your risk of developing high blood pressure, stroke, or arrhythmias (irregular beating of the heart).

Liver

The primary function of the liver is to break down and clear toxic substances from the body. This includes alcohol. However, the liver becomes overburdened with alcohol content in the body over time, leading to chronic liver inflammation. Consequently, a compromised liver becomes incapable of performing its natural functions. Some examples of alcohol-induced liver conditions are:

- Cirrhosis
- Steatosis, or fatty liver
- Fibrosis
- Alcoholic hepatitis

Pancreas

The pancreas regulates insulin production in the body. It's also responsible for controlling blood glucose. However, after alcohol addiction and the body battling to maintain its optimal functions, the pancreas also takes a hit. Alcohol addiction can result in the production of toxic substances from the pancreas. This leads to pancreatitis (inflammation of the organ) and diabetes (especially Type 1 diabetes).

Immune System

Having a weakened immune system means your body's natural line of defense has lost its ability to ward off diseases it could have defeated. According to Healthline, people who abuse alcohol are 45% at risk of contracting tuberculosis and pneumonia when exposed to the microorganism responsible for these diseases. Meanwhile, a study conducted by WebMD revealed that drinking excessively on a single occasion can slow down immune functions for up to 24 hours.

To conclude, alcohol addiction is a real battle worldwide, and unless you are ready to receive professional help immediately, the consequences can be dire.

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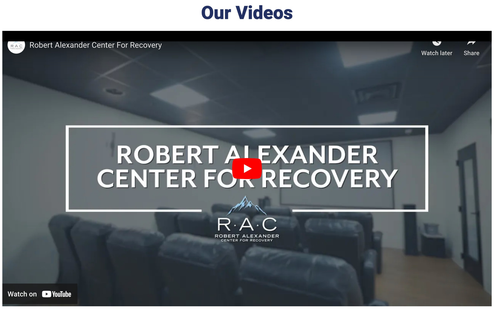
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