Can You Be A Highly Functional Alcoholic

By The Professionals At Robert Alexander Center

The way that alcoholism is presented in the media is often misleading. People assume that alcoholics are unable to hold down a job or carry out even the most basic of responsibilities. For some alcoholics, that is the reality and their addiction gets in the way of everything else in their lives.

However, that is not always the case. You may have already heard the term functional alcoholic, but a lot of people are unclear on what it means and whether it is a real thing. So, can you be a highly functioning alcoholic?

What Is A Highly Functioning Alcoholic?

A highly functioning alcoholic is someone who manages to carry out their everyday reponsibilities and other commitments despite having an addiction. They may not be as productive as they'd like to be, but this type of person can still keep up personal relationships and other parts of their life. For some people, this enables them to continue using alcohol without anyone else knowing the extent of their problem or recognizing that there might actually be a serious issue.

Alcohol Use Disorder (AUD) is diagnosed using a number of different criteria. These include:

- **Craving alcohol**
- **Alcohol is often taken in larger amounts or over a longer period than was wanted**
- **The person has experienced difficulties cutting down on their drinking at some point**
- **There are physical or mental health consequences caused by drinking, which the person either ignores or doesn't recognize**
- **The presence of tolerance (the need to drink increasing amounts of alcohol)**
- **Inability to stop drinking even though it is causing problems at work or in personal relationships**

In a highly functional alcoholic, this last symptom is not present because their addiction is not causing any noticeable problems with work or personal relationships. However, they can still be considered to have an AUD because they meet some or all of the other criteria.

Unfortunately, the fact that they are able to hold important parts of their life together means that people see it as less of a problem than other forms of AUD. In some cases, people even think that functional alcoholics can continue as they are with no issue, but that is not the case. Anybody with an AUD needs to seek specialist treatment, regardless of how it presents itself.

How To Spot The Signs Of A Functional Alcoholic

Identifying highly functional alcoholics can be difficult because the obvious signs, like being fired from their job or clashing with friends and family members are not there. They go about their daily lives and their drinking is a background issue that is often well hidden.

However, there are some common signs of a functional alcoholic to look for. These include:

- **They regularly drink larger amounts of alcohol than other people without getting drunk**
- **Their drinking is often hidden (drinking before an event, for example)**
- **Alcohol is their go-to way of coping with stress, anxiety, or pain**
- **They are not receptive to feedback about how much they drink**
- **Constantly trying to control how much they drink**
- **Comparing themselves to other people with a serious AUD to justify their drinking**
- **Justifying their drinking by buying more expensive alcohol brands**
- **Still being able to perform well at work**

If you notice any of these symptoms in yourself or a loved one, you should consider different treatment options, like outpatient programs, for example.

Do Highly Functioning Alcoholics Need Treatment?

It's a misconception that highly functional alcoholics don't need to seek treatment. Even though their drinking may not be causing problems at work, it is still having long-term effects on their mental and physical health. The nature of addiction also means that their drinking will only continue to get worse in the future.

Functional alcoholics often need detoxification treatments as they drink large amounts on a regular basis. Coming off alcohol using the 'cold turkey' method can be dangerous for somebody that has been drinking heavily for a long time.

There are also some excellent outpatient programs that are effective for highly functional alcoholics. As these people are still able to hold down a job and keep their family together, they have other responsibilities outside of their recovery, so they cannot go into a full-time rehab program. Inpatient programs are there to give them the support they need while they continue with their lives as normal.

The intensive option is well-suited to those that have been struggling with a serious AUD for the majority of their life and need a lot of intervention.

Can you be a highly functional alcoholic? Yes, you can, and it is just as dangerous as any other form of addiction. If you think that you or a loved one is struggling with addiction, it is important that you seek professional treatment right away.

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