



Recovery Notes

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Scientific Recovery

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For Problems with Alcohol

OUTPATIENT TREATMENT FOR HIGH-PROFILE WOMEN

2010 • ISSUE 3

Professional Women and Alcohol Dependence

Professional women are especially vulnerable to acquiring alcohol dependence. Most often, they are known as “high functioning alcoholics.”



Over four million women in the United States meet the criteria for alcohol abuse or alcohol dependence, also known as alcoholism. Many of these are professional women who may be wealthy, have celebrity status, or have succeeded in competitive fields like law, business, higher education, or medicine. Virtually none match the stereotype of a “down and out” drunk. Most often, these professional women are “high functioning alcoholics.” Usually, professional women who have become alcohol dependent do not fully recognize that they have become addicted to alcohol or that their physical and/or emotional complaints, such as stomach pains or depression, are caused or seriously exacerbated by excessive drinking.

Alcoholism often remains concealed in a professional woman’s workplace. Women who work independently, who set their own hours, who drink mostly at home, or do not “act out” when intoxicated may keep their alcoholism concealed at work. Alcohol related tardiness or absence from work may be disguised by an excuse of staying home with sick children or wanting to finish a work project at home before coming in (late) to the office.

Unfortunately, the disease process of alcoholism can be so subtle that it is invisible to even the alcoholic woman herself.

Eventually, as her alcohol dependence worsens, drinking acquires a very central place in a professional woman’s life. She begins to organize her life around being able to acquire and drink alcohol. As the disease process advances, she becomes more invisible and more isolated as she gradually retreats from her usual activities, neglects her obligations, and withdraws from relationships. Unfortunately, the disease process of alcoholism can be so subtle that it is invisible to even the alcoholic woman herself.

ALCOHOLISM IS A BRAIN DISEASE

As women reflect on their relationships with alcohol, it is important to recognize that the out-of-date notion of alcohol dependence as a moral failing or evidence of character weakness has been discredited for several decades. Scientific research has shown that the slow, insidious, progressive, and eventually fatal process known as alcoholism is a complex disease of the brain. Not unlike diabetes and heart disease, alcohol dependence has an intricate etiology that includes personal, social, and cultural factors. Both a woman’s genetic make-up and her environment

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contribute to her risk for alcoholism.

Physical dependence on alcohol occurs gradually. Over time, drinking too much changes the balance of chemicals in the brain associated with the pleasurable aspects of drinking alcohol. Long-term, excessive drinking can affect the balance of these chemicals, causing the brain to crave alcohol in order to restore good feelings or to avoid negative feelings.

In some women, alcohol's long term effects can change the way the brain reacts to alcohol, with the result that the urge to drink can be as compelling as the hunger for food.

Thus, alcoholism is a disease based in the brain. It is chronic, or lifelong, and it can be both progressive and life threatening. Alcohol's short term effects on the brain are what cause some women to feel high, relaxed, or sleepy after drinking. In some women, alcohol's long term effects can change the way the brain reacts to alcohol, with the result that the urge to drink can be as compelling as the hunger for food.

CHARACTERISTICS OF ALCOHOLISM:

- **Craving:** a strong need, or compulsion, to drink
- **Loss of control:** the inability to stop drinking once a person has begun
- **Physical dependence:** withdrawal symptoms, such as nausea, sweating, shakiness, and anxiety, when alcohol use is stopped after a period of heavy drinking
- **Tolerance:** the need for increasing amounts of alcohol to get high

HEALTH CONSEQUENCES OF ALCOHOLISM.

- **Alcoholic liver disease:** Women develop alcoholic liver disease more quickly and after drinking less alcohol than men. Women are more likely than men to develop alcoholic hepatitis (liver inflammation) and to die from cirrhosis.
- **Brain disease:** Most alcoholics have some loss of mental function, reduced brain size, and changes in the function of brain cells. Research suggests that women are especially vulnerable to alcohol induced brain damage.
- **Cancer:** Many studies report that heavy drinking increases the risk of breast cancer. Alcohol is also linked to cancers of the head and neck and the digestive tract.
- **Heart disease:** Chronic heavy drinking is a leading cause of cardiovascular disease.

RECOVERY FROM ALCOHOLISM

To recover from alcohol dependence, ultimately, the alcoholic woman must assume responsibility for her own life and for tackling her disease. Most experts also recommend total abstinence from alcohol as crucial to successful recovery. Thus, abstinence is usually viewed as a core recovery goal.

Fortunately, for the woman who has developed alcohol dependence and faces up to her problem, numerous avenues for treatment are available. And, for women who are motivated and committed, appropriate, well-conducted treatment is effective.

Because of the risk of potentially dangerous alcohol withdrawal symptoms, any woman who has been drinking consistently should see a physician and be honest about her usual alcohol intake before giving up

alcohol completely. Alcohol detoxification can be accomplished safely under medical supervision.

However, it's not enough just to stop drinking. Effectual alcoholism treatment offers far more. Most experts agree that successful recovery from alcohol dependence is about a woman's ending her relationship with alcohol and establishing or rebuilding essential connections to other people and to herself so that she can construct a satisfying life without alcohol.

In treatment, women learn how to acknowledge the power of their addiction to alcohol while discovering their own personal power. Women learn about alcoholism and acquire new coping strategies to deal with stress without turning to alcohol. They re-discover themselves and their values, examine and evaluate issues and relationships, and

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create new paths for themselves. And, they develop and use new tools that will work in their personal and professional lives. In the treatment and recovery process, women gain a new appreciation of their potential and abilities that were once masked by the disease of alcoholism and discover fulfillment and pleasure in an alcohol-free life.

Scientific Recovery

Scientific Recovery is an evidence-based treatment program for women seeking state-of-the-art, individual therapy for problem drinking. Our focus is on professional women who have recognized that alcohol is a problem they no longer want in their lives. Our goal is to assist women not only to eliminate their alcohol dependence, but also to be happy that they did.



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