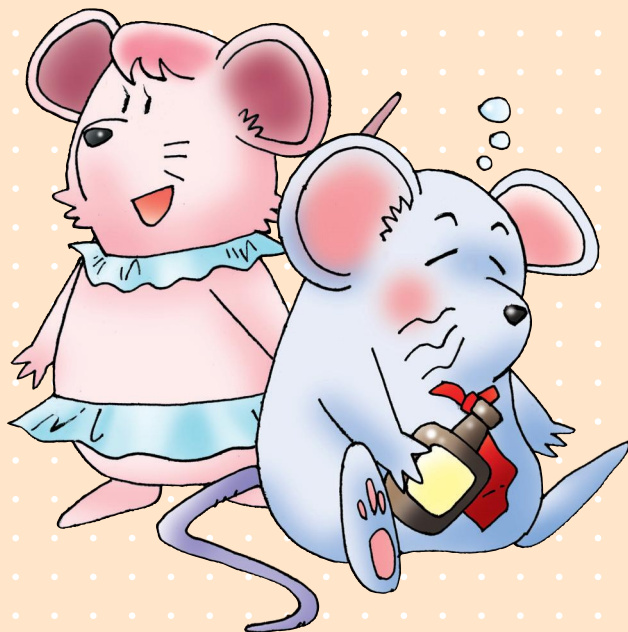


Mental Health Course 1

# 「Alcohol Dependence」

Does Alcohol Cause Depression?



Shizuoka City Mental Health Center

**Do you drink to relieve stress?**

**Do you drink to feel better when something bad happens?**

**Do you drink to help you sleep?**

**Did you know that alcohol abuse has symptoms like that of depression?**

**Did you know that alcohol abuse can cause insomnia?**

**Did you know that alcohol abuse can cause forgetfulness and dementia?**

**Did you know that alcohol abuse can kill you?**

Even if alcohol doesn't make you violent, you still may have a problem.

**If you are drinking in the daytime for three days straight, it is highly likely that you are dependent on alcohol. Seek help.**



**Don't only weak people become alcoholics?**

Some people develop addictions to alcohol and some do not, even though they drink the same amount. Alcoholism has nothing to do with weak-mindedness, lack of self discipline, or poor morals. Unfortunately, we still don't know exactly who will become an alcoholic. However, we do know that alcohol is a drug that can cause physical and mental dependencies. If this happens, not even the strongest will can break it alone.

**Alcohol addiction doesn't happen because you are weak. Remember this.**

**Is alcoholism a disease?**

It is, and it doesn't happen to "bad, weak people who drink a lot." Alcohol dependency is not a disease of the liver. It is a disease of the brain.

**Alcoholism is a mental illness, one that needs medical care. Correct information is the first step for both prevention and treatment.**



## How does one become an alcoholic?

There are more than a few people with alcohol dependencies who originally had only a low alcohol tolerance.

### Party Drinking

In Japan, it often starts with drinking at special events, such as welcome parties for new coworkers and New Year's events.

### Habitual Drinking

Once you start drinking to relax, it is very easy to starting consuming alcohol every day. Then, you start having drinks when you really aren't supposed to, and then you may come to the point where you can't stop yourself.

### Continual and Repeated Drinking

After many long periods of drinking, it is possible that you feel nervous or irritable when the alcohol wears off. This is one sign of psychological dependence. Of course, there are also many people who begin to feel these symptoms while still at the habitual drinking stage.

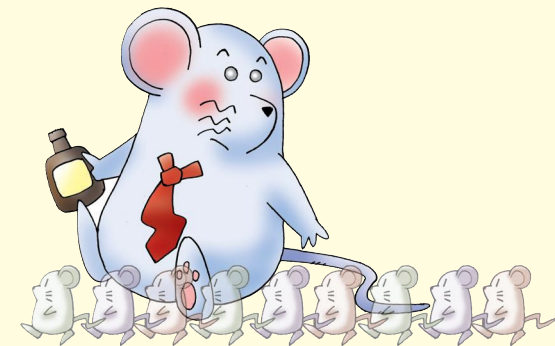
Once a person develops an alcohol addiction, it remains with that person forever. It is much like riding a bicycle: our bodies never completely forget how to ride, no matter how long it has been since we last rode - nor how much time has passed since our last drink. Dependence on alcohol is a chronic and progressive illness that can never be completely cured.



## Does alcohol addiction get worse?

When the body of a person with alcohol dependence removes all the alcohol, it goes into withdrawal. In this state of withdrawal, you can experience not only psychological symptoms such as nervousness, impatience and irritability, but also physical ones like trembling, impaired speech, insomnia, sweats, headaches, the urge to vomit, and more. Having these symptoms when there is no longer alcohol in the body means physical dependence.

As the alcohol dependency grows, the sufferer can experience convulsions and auditory and visual hallucinations. Many people start to hear the voices of others insulting, or complaining about the sufferer. Visual hallucinations can come in the form of ants, maggots, snakes, mice or rats, even lots of little people. And because drinking more alcohol eliminates these symptoms, the sufferer finds it harder and harder not to drink, worsening the cycle.



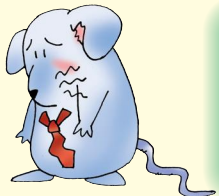
## Alcoholism is an illness that degrades character, changes personality, and can lead to death

How likely someone is to become addicted to alcohol has nothing to do with character or strength of will. However, alcoholism causes personality and capability problems, which can lead to loss of job, friends and even family. Extensive alcohol abuse directly damages brain cells, causing the brain to atrophy. At the same time, sufferers may begin to lie to others about their alcohol consumption because they weren't able to stop drinking of their own accord. People with this addiction begin attacking others and blaming themselves, their personalities changing to be more accusatory and self-abusive.

Shunned by family members, feeling sad and alone and beset by guilt, some sufferers resort to suicide.

## Alcohol dependence is a disease that can lead to death

Alcohol gradually makes change within the brain, and as this happens the brain needs more alcohol. Accordingly, the greater volume of alcohol causes damage throughout the body: it harms the liver (a well-known consequence), it damages the functioning of the pancreas (increasing the chances of diabetes), and raises the possibility of cancer of the esophagus or the large intestine. There are often chronic cases of diarrhea or malnutrition that are highly resistant to medical treatment. Damage to the brain can lead to the early onset of dementia, and serious depression is far from uncommon. Alcohol addiction can lead to accidents or even suicide.



It is very difficult to treat or recover from alcoholism-induced dementia, and alcoholic depression is much harder than more general forms of depression.

## To treat alcohol dependence

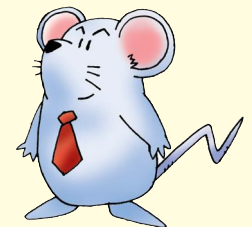
The most important thing is not to consume any. Not a single drink, no cooking alcohol, no treats or desserts with alcohol in them. Even if you have stopped drinking for years, if you have even small amounts, it is extremely easy to resume consuming alcohol as you did during the height of your addiction. It is similar to restoring a dried-up well - adding just a bucket of water can cause the well to start filling again. A glass of alcohol can re-activate the addiction in your brain like a switch being turned on.

The most important factor in ending alcohol addiction is to never drink again.

## Where can people get treatment for alcoholism?

① Certain hospitals and clinics have alcohol dependency specialists; at such places they educate people about alcoholism and conduct psychiatric therapy or psychotherapy. When necessary, they can provide alcohol deterrent drugs or sleeping medication.

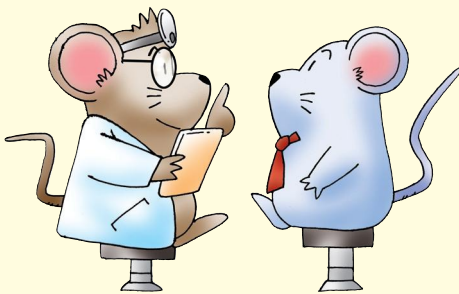
② Self-help groups such as Danshūkai or Alcoholics Anonymous are composed of recovering alcoholics. The members support each other because they understand the agony of alcohol dependence more than a non-sufferer can. The members of these groups encourage each other in getting treatment and finding new ways to live without alcohol.



# Signs of Alcohol dependence

- 1 Have you ever felt you should cut down on your drinking?
- 2 Have people annoyed you by criticizing your drinking?
- 3 Have you ever felt bad or guilty about your drinking?
- 4 Have you had a drink first thing in the morning to steady your nerves or get rid of a hangover (eye-opener)?

If you answered “yes” to two or more of the questions, the possibility is strong that you are dependent on alcohol. These questions are called the CAGE test (CAGE is made from the first letter of key words in each question). Ask yourself these questions. Avoiding the truth by telling yourself that you don’t drink much more than other people, or that you don’t have a drinking problem only makes treatment and recover that much harder.



## Please Contact Us

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All consultations will be held in Japanese.  
If necessary, please bring an interpreter with you.