

A Brief Guide To Alcoholics Anonymous

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What Is Alcoholism?

Alcoholism is recognised as a major health problem. In the UK it ranks alongside heart disease and cancer – and it does not damage alcoholics alone. Others are hurt by its effects – in the home, at work and on the road. Alcoholism costs the community millions of pounds every year. So whether or not you ever become an alcoholic yourself, alcoholism still can have an impact on your life.

We have learnt a great deal about how to identify and arrest alcoholism. But so far no one has discovered a way to prevent it, because nobody knows exactly *why* some drinkers turn into alcoholics. Doctors and Scientists in the field have not agreed on the cause or causes of alcoholism.

For that reason AA concentrates on helping those who are already alcoholics, so that they can stop drinking and learn how to live a normal happy life without alcohol. As AA sees it alcoholism is an illness. Alcoholics cannot control their drinking because they are ill in body mind or emotions. If they do not stop drinking their alcoholism always gets worse.

Both British & American Medical associations have also said that Alcoholism is an illness.

What are the symptoms?

Not all alcoholics have the same symptoms but many show these signs:

They find that only alcohol can make them feel self confident & at ease with other people.

Often want “just one more” at the end of a party
Look forward to drinking occasions, and think about them a lot. Get drunk when they had not planned to; try to control drinking by changing types of drink, going on the wagon.

Sneak drinks hide bottles & lie about their drinking. Drink at work or school; drink alone. Experience memory losses, (blackouts) the next day, of what they said and did the night before.

Drink in the morning to relieve hangovers, guilt & fears. Fail to eat properly and become malnourished. Get cirrhosis of the liver,

Shake, hallucinate and get convulsions when withdrawn from alcohol.

What Is A.A?

Alcoholics Anonymous is a worldwide fellowship of men & women who help each other to stay sober. They offer the same help to anyone who has a drink problem, and wants to do something about it. Since they are all alcoholics themselves, they have a special understanding of each other. They know what the illness feels like – and have recovered from it in A.A.

AA members say they *are* alcoholics today – even when they have not had a drink for many years. They do not say

they are “cured”, Once people have lost their ability to control their drinking they can never again drink safely – or in other words, they can never be “former alcoholics” or “ex alcoholics” But in AA they can become sober or *recovered* alcoholics.

How does A.A help the alcoholic?

Through the example and friendship of the recovered alcoholics in A.A new members are encouraged to stay away from a drink “One day at a time”, as the AA members do. Instead of “swearing off forever” or worrying about whether they will be sober tomorrow, AA members concentrate on not drinking right now – today. By keeping alcohol out of their systems, newcomers take care of that part of their illness – their bodies have a chance to get well. But remember, there is another part. If they are going to stay sober, they need healthy minds and emotions too. So they begin to straighten out their confused thinking and unhappy feelings by following AA’s suggested “Twelve Steps” to recovery. These steps suggest ideas and actions that can guide alcoholics towards happy and useful lives.

To stay in touch new members go to AA meetings regularly with other members and learn about the recovery program.

What are A.A. Meetings?

Alcoholics Anonymous is made up of over 100.00 local groups in 150 countries. In the Great Britain & Continental European Region there are currently about 3,500 groups. The people in each group get together, usually once or twice a week, to hold AA meetings of two main types:

“Closed Meetings”

Are for Alcoholics only, group discussions where any members who wish to speak up, ask questions and share their thoughts with fellow members. At “closed” meetings AA’s get help with personal problems to stay sober in everyday living. Other AA’s can explain how they have already handled the same problems - often using one or more of the twelve steps.

“Open Meetings”

At “open” meetings speakers tell how they drank, how they discovered AA and how its programme has helped them. Members bring along relatives & friends, anyone interested in AA is welcome to attend at “Open meetings.

Who belongs to A.A?

Like other illnesses, alcoholism strikes all sorts of people. So the men & women in AA are of all races & nationalities, all religions, and no religion at all. They work at all occupations, lawyers, housewives, teachers, lorry drivers, waitresses and the clergy. Surveys indicate the total AA membership at over 2..2 million worldwide.

Does an Alcoholic have to go "all the way down" before A.A. can help?

AA was started in 1935 by a New York stockbroker and an Ohio surgeon, who had both been "hopeless" drunks at first most AA members also had been seriously ill, their drinking having sent them to hospitals, sanatoriums or jails. But more & more people began to hear about AA and soon many alcoholics found they did not have to let their illness do that much damage. They could recover in AA before their health had been totally wrecked and while they still had jobs, homes and families.

Are there any young people in AA?

In recent years, a great many young alcoholics have come into AA the pamphlet "Young People & AA" gives personal stories of ten who joined when they were under 30 – including one at 16 & one at 18. Stories of these younger members can also be seen on the video "A message to Young People" They are cheerfully staying sober & take part in AA activities.

Who runs A.A.?

AA has no real government. Each group is free to work out its own customs & ways of holding meetings, as long as it does not harm other groups or AA as a whole. The members elect a chairperson, secretary and other group officers. These officers do not govern or give orders to anyone, their job is to see the meetings run smoothly, and Rotation of officer posts is carried out once or twice a year.

But the individual group is not cut off from the rest of AA; just as members help each other, so do the groups here are some ways they exchange help:

1. Groups in the same area set up an Intergroup
2. Intergroup in turn belong to geographically determined Regional organisations.
3. Groups everywhere can share their experience by keeping in touch with AA General Service Office in York
4. Groups in the UK choose representatives to go to AA General Service Conference, held once a year.

All these and their representatives at the Conference make suggestions based on the experiences of many different AA groups. But they do not make rules or issue commands to any group or member.

What does it cost to belong to A.A.?

There are no dues or fees for AA membership.

But money is needed for some purposes, renting the meeting rooms, buying milk, tea, coffee & biscuits, buying of books, pamphlets and magazines. So a collection is taken during the meeting. Members put in whatever they can afford, Groups also contribute to General Service Office and other AA activities.

In return for the AA help that members give to each other, they are never paid. Their reward is something much better than money – it is their own sobriety. AA members have found that helping other alcoholics is the best way to stay sober themselves.

What can families of alcoholics do?

AA is just for the alcoholic, but two other fellowships can help their relatives & friends, Al-Anon Family groups & Alateen, for young people who have alcoholic parents.

What A.A does NOT do

1. AA does not run membership drives to try to persuade alcoholics into joining. AA is for alcoholics who want to get sober.
2. AA does not check up on members to see they don't drink. It helps alcoholics to help themselves.
3. AA is not a religious organisation. All members are free to decide on their own personal ideas.
4. AA is not a medical organisation, does not give out medicines or psychiatric advice.
5. AA does not run any hospitals, wards or treatment centres, does not provide nursing care.
6. AA is not connected to any other organisation. But AA does cooperate with all who fight alcoholism. Some members work for such organisations – as individuals – not as representatives of AA.
7. AA does not accept any money from outside sources either private or government.
8. AA does not offer any social services, does not provide housing, food, clothing, jobs or money. It helps alcoholics to stay sober so as they can earn these things themselves.
9. Alcoholics Anonymous lives up to the anonymous part of its name. It does not want member's names to be used on TV Radio or in newspapers. Members do not

disclose other member's names to people outside AA. They are not ashamed of AA membership, they want to encourage more alcoholics to come to AA for help but do not want to make heroes or heroines of themselves, simply for taking care of their own sobriety.

10. AA does not provide letters of reference to courts, social services or employees etc

How can you find out more about A.A.?

Most towns and cities have an AA listing in the telephone book, or you can ring the National Helpline Number: 0800 917 7650 (24hr)

Write to us at:

AA General Service Office

PO Box 1

10 Toft Green York

YO1 7NU

01904 644 026 (office hours)

www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk

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The A.A. Pledge

"When anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help, I want the hand of A.A always to be there.

And for that: I am responsible"

