

Early, Mid, and Late Stages of Alcoholism

Most people can handle moderate alcohol consumption without a problem, but for those with certain risk factors, it can become an uncontrollable addiction. The stages of alcoholism can progress to the point that it can have serious consequences for the addicts as well as those around them unless [intervention](#) and proper treatment comes into play.

From Habit to Addiction

Like other types of addiction, alcoholism is a progressive disease. Most people are unaware that they are crossing the line from habit to addiction until it is too late for them to stop on their own. [The classic signs that recreational drinking is morphing into alcoholism include:](#)

- A very strong urge or craving for alcohol
- The inability to stop drinking once you have started
- The onset of withdrawal symptoms, such as shakiness, nausea and sweating, when you have not had a drink for a while
- The need to drink larger amounts of alcohol to overcome the tolerance your body has built up

As addicts progress through the different stages of alcoholism, they are often confronted with serious medical issues, including significant damage to liver, brain or other organs or the development of cancer. The effects of alcoholism, however, are not exclusive to the addict. Pregnant women who abuse alcohol risk having babies with birth defects or fetal alcohol syndrome, and everyone is at risk when an alcoholic experiences an [alcohol blackout](#) or gets behind the wheel of a car.

Most experts classify the progression of the disease in three stages: early, middle and end/late-stage alcoholism. Some classify the disease into four stages, including the adaptive stage, dependence, progression and conclusion. If you have alcohol addiction or trying to help someone who is, it can be helpful to [understand how alcoholism presents itself throughout each of these stages](#).

Early Addiction Stage

The early stages of alcoholism are often difficult to detect as there may not be any obvious impairment or dysfunction. During this stage, the addict's body is [building up a tolerance](#) to alcohol, so he may be able to drink larger quantities without losing control. The key to identifying this stage of the disease is to understand the social aspects of it. If others notice something different about you, even if they cannot readily identify what it is, or if you find yourself consistently drinking to deal with stress or other problems, it is possible that you are in the early stage of alcoholism.

The Middle Stage and its Effects

During alcoholism's middle stage, you will start to notice the physical and social effects of drinking. Alcoholic blackouts may occur after excessive drinking. You will develop a strong craving for alcohol

and may [experience symptoms of withdrawal](#) if you cannot have any. Physical withdrawal symptoms include:

- Enlarged pupils
- Severe headaches
- Clammy, pale skin
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea or vomiting
- Rapid heartbeat
- Excessive sweating
- Shakiness and tremors

“Alcoholic blackouts may occur after excessive drinking.” Alcoholism also affects you psychologically, and you may find that when you do not drink, you suffer from anxiety, depression, fatigue, insomnia, irritability, mood swings and nightmares.

At this point, it may become obvious to those around you that you have a problem with alcohol, and you may also start to recognize that there is an issue. Many alcoholics begin hiding the amount they drink or making excuses for it during this phase. You may also have problems completing tasks at work, home or school, and your relationships with others may start to crumble. Many alcoholics stop worrying about their appearance during this stage.

Alcoholism's Late or End Stage

The end or late stages of alcoholism are when you have lost total control, and the disease starts to impact you physically, socially and mentally. By this point, you have probably become so obsessed with drinking that you have allowed it to interfere with or destroy your relationship with friends and family. Alcoholic blackouts happen more frequently, and you cannot fall asleep at night without drinking.

Many alcoholics are still able to hold down a job at this stage but not for long. Even if they are able to physically get the job done, all of their mental focus is on their next drink. Work will start to suffer eventually.

Whether you realize it or not, you may start experiencing medical problems due to the excessive drinking. Alcoholism can cause hepatitis, [cirrhosis of the liver](#), recurring respiratory infections and pancreatitis. In severe cases, alcoholism can even cause heart failure or brain damage.

Get Help for Alcohol Abuse

The stages of alcoholism don't progress overnight. It often takes years of abuse before [moving from one stage to the other](#). If you think you may be an alcoholic, consider getting addiction treatment before the disease causes you serious medical harm.

What is Alcohol Blackout Syndrome?

An alcohol blackout — also known as alcohol-induced amnesia — is when a person's memory is impaired due to alcohol intake or alcohol addiction. Alcohol blackouts are not the same as passing out or fainting. They are more like a temporary form of amnesia that makes a person forget events immediately following alcohol intake. "alcohol blackout is when a person's memory is impaired due to alcohol intake or or alcohol addiction." Statistics provided by Alcoholics Anonymous appear to suggest that [blackouts are an indication of alcoholism](#), although this theory is not backed by any specific scientific studies. According to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), [victims of alcohol blackouts are most likely to be young adults](#) and binge drinkers. Blackouts mean that individuals are more susceptible to engaging in high-risk behaviors that they may not even recall after the alcohol has worn off.

Various Causes of Blackouts

The risk of an individual experiencing a blackout increases once alcohol levels pass a certain point. Although the actual amount of alcohol will vary between individuals, it is most likely to happen when a person's alcohol level reaches .15. This is extremely high when compared to the legal driving limit of .08. Despite this, some individuals may not [feel the effects of alcohol](#) at this level. Drinking quickly also increases a person's chances of experiencing an alcohol blackout, because it takes the average human body an hour to process one drink.

What are Potential Risks?

The obvious risk associated with a blackout is that being under the influence of copious amounts of alcohol is not the best time to make important decisions. This situation not only puts the safety of the individual at risk but also that of other people around them. A person who would not normally drink and drive may decide to take the risk when under the influence. Being unable to remember events from the day (or night) before means that a person may be unable to recall potentially dangerous situations. An alcohol blackout is [the body's way of warning people](#) they have had too much to drink.

How Long-Term Use Affects You

While it is true that most people will suffer at least one alcohol-induced blackout in their lifetimes, repeated blackouts can have a significant effect on an individual's brain. According to the NIAAA, repeated alcohol blackouts can cause:

- Permanent memory impairment
- Impaired cognitive development
- Behavioral problems
- Brain damage

If an individual has blacked out or is blacking out on a regular basis, this can be a sign of damage to certain cells in the person's brain according to the NIAAA. Repeated episodes of alcohol blackouts should not be ignored; individuals should seek advice from a physician or [alcohol support group](#).

Factoid:

Studies carried out by a California University discovered that individuals who had suffered a head injury at some point in their lives were at a greater risk of blacking out. This was totally unrelated to the levels of alcohol in their system. Individuals who suffer from diabetes are also more prone to suffering an alcohol blackout.

The Relationship Between Alcoholism and Blackouts

Although alcoholics do usually suffer from frequent alcohol-induced blackouts, a person does not have to suffer from alcoholism to suffer a blackout. Blackouts are a direct result of how much alcohol a person drinks at once or in a single sitting and not of how much they drink over a longer time period. People who drink on a regular basis will naturally develop a higher tolerance to alcohol. This does not mean they will not suffer from blackouts, just that their alcohol levels will be a lot higher when the blackout occurs.

Unfortunately, there is no way of knowing how much alcohol an individual can tolerate. An alcohol level that may have no effect on one individual may have fatal consequences for another, making [drinking large amounts of alcohol](#) a very risky business.

Take Preventative Steps

The only guaranteed way to prevent having an alcohol blackout is to not drink alcohol.

