

FREQUENTLY ASKED
QUESTIONS ABOUT

Mental Illness with Alcohol Use Disorder



1 What is alcohol use disorder?

Alcohol use disorder (AUD) is sometimes called alcoholism or alcohol addiction. AUD is a chronic disease that causes people to

- drink more alcohol or drink more frequently than planned
- have difficulty controlling the amount of alcohol they drink
- continue to drink even if they experience problems with their physical or mental health, their family, their school, or their job.

What are signs of AUD?

2

- Drinking more and longer than planned
- Having difficulty reducing or stopping drinking when you want to
- Spending a lot of time drinking or recovering from the effects of drinking
- Having strong cravings for alcohol
- Drinking to the point that it affects your family, school, job, or other personal activities
- No longer participating or feeling less pleasure in activities that were once fun
- Getting into dangerous situations because of drinking
- Drinking even though it causes sad or anxious feelings or a health problem
- Having to drink more than before to get the same effects
- Having trouble sleeping, anxiety, depression, nausea, shakiness, or sweating after not drinking for a certain time

3 What is a co-occurring alcohol use disorder (COD-alcohol)?

A person with AUD may also have a mental illness. This is called co-occurring alcohol use disorder (COD-alcohol).

4 How often does COD-alcohol occur?

Half of the people with AUD also have a mental illness, but few people with AUD get the treatment that they need.

5 Which mental illnesses are most often linked to AUD and why?

AUD is most often linked to depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, and schizophrenia, among others.

6 How are AUD and mental illness related to each other?

The full relationship is not totally clear, but people with alcohol or other substance use disorders are more likely to develop mental illnesses, and people with certain mental illnesses are more likely to develop alcohol or other substance use disorders.

- Around one out of five people with a mental illness also has a substance use disorder
- one out of five people with AUD has anxiety
- three or four out of ten people with AUD have depression

7 What causes AUD/COD-alcohol?

Some of the same things that cause mental illness can cause AUD. These include the following:

- A family member with a mental illness or substance use problem
- A very upsetting or stressful event or situation
- Childhood trauma, such as childhood neglect or abuse
- Other factors that are not well understood

8 Is it possible to recover from COD-alcohol?

Yes. Recovery is possible, especially when people get treatment for both their AUD and their mental illness. Drinking alcohol can interfere with the effectiveness of medications for mental illness, so the first step toward recovery is often alcohol detoxification, or detox. Detox can be life-threatening, so it's important to get help from a doctor before going through detox. After detox is complete, a person will often receive outpatient treatment, including medication, group, and individual therapy. Medications can be used to treat the symptoms of the mental illness and to help reduce the risk of alcohol use relapse by decreasing cravings for alcohol. Therapy can help people understand the link between mental illness and alcohol use. A person with COD-alcohol will likely need to continue with group and individual therapy to stay alcohol-free and will likely continue to need treatment for their mental illness.