

Let's Talk: Alcohol misuse

Presenter – Dr. Mary Anderson

Hi, I'm Dr. Mary Anderson. Let's talk about alcoholism. For anyone who thinks they, or someone they care about, may have a problem with alcohol, there is hope. Folks I have worked with in solid recovery from alcohol and drug addictions see every moment of their sober life as a gift. They fully embrace life because of how they have suffered.

Addiction takes control

The addicted brain is like a hostage. The mind has been hijacked by the addiction. It's like two brains in one, where the true self can't break free from the hijacker. It is mind boggling to watch someone engage in self-destructive behavior such as drinking too much alcohol.

The two-year old in charge

I think of the addicted part of the brain like having a two-year old in charge. Everyone has moments of feeling or acting like a little two-year old. Like we're trying to avoid difficult tasks, or wanting dessert for dinner. No one gets to adulthood without having been two years old.

Loss of control

Now, picture the brain of a person with a tendency towards an alcohol addiction. They may be highly successful in many areas of their life. But give them a drink and suddenly the two-year old in their brain is in charge of their universe.

Living from drink to drink

All the previous rational, reasonable, goal-directed behavior goes out the window. The brain becomes hostage to that two-year old obsessing about alcohol. All their usual meaningful activities and pleasures of life are just tasks to get through until they can drink again.

What happens in the brain?

In the brain when the reward pathway is triggered dopamine is released in the pleasure center. For an alcoholic, alcohol is so rewarding that it can lead to recurring alcohol use to the point that the

neurons have changed, and they're desensitized and raw when they don't have sedation. Anxiety and craving for alcohol increases with even more loss of control over drinking.

A sense of panic

This can lead to physical dependence and the need for medical intervention. The person with the alcohol problem may find themselves in a fog wondering how in the heck they got there. The drive to drink can be so strong that it's like the drive to breath. Imagine the panic of drowning and how one's life depends on that next breath.

Recognizing the issue

That's both the problem and the solution for the treatment of alcoholism. If a person is able to see that they are being controlled by ill hijacked part of their brain, they may become willing to accept a lifeline and accept help to do whatever it takes to get free.

Getting help

Treatment and community 12-step programs are examples of ways in which a completely new sober lifestyle can be obtained. It's important to note maintaining sobriety is a lifelong process. Fortunately, the same life skills that help a person to overcome addiction on a daily basis also can lead to a happier and healthier life.

Find additional information online at the [National Institute on Alcohol and Alcoholism website](#).

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