

Alcoholism is a disease which affects millions of people around the world. It was long thought that people who developed an addiction to alcohol did so because of a lack of virtue or self-control. We now know, however, that there are many other factors such as family history, psychological outlook and social pressures which have been shown to make certain people more likely than others to become alcoholics.

The Mayo Clinic states that certain genetic factors increase one's chances of developing a drinking problem. In other words, if a person's parents or grandparents struggled with alcohol addiction, it places that person at greater risk of suffering from the disease. A study in Sweden followed alcohol use in twins who were adopted as children and reared apart. The incidence of alcoholism was slightly higher among those twins who were exposed to alcoholism only through their adoptive families. However, it was dramatically higher among the twins whose biological parents were alcoholics, regardless of the presence of alcoholism in their adoptive families. Still, this trend is only a possibility and not a certainty for everyone who has a history of the disease in their family.

A person's psychological state is another major factor when it comes to determining the risk of alcoholism. As explained by the Mayo Clinic, some people tend to drink heavily during times of turmoil, stress or emotional pain. Some feel that drinking numbs the pain and relieves their stress, and alcohol serves as a coping mechanism. People with low self-esteem are also at greater risk of becoming dependent on alcohol simply because they want to fit in with their friends who drink. It can be difficult for them to separate themselves from these people due to the fact that being around them boosts their self esteem. In both of these examples, the behavior of the person leads to the progression of the disease. In a short time, the person finds themselves unable to handle daily life without the assistance of alcohol.

Most people in the world live in a society in which drinking alcohol is portrayed as glamorous and necessary for having fun. It should be no surprise then that social pressure is a leading cause of the spread of alcoholism. The notion of drinking can become embedded in a culture and increase the pressure to drink just to fit in. With many countries imposing age restrictions on alcohol consumption, many impressionable teenagers see drinking as a way to prove their maturity. College life, for many in the United States, is synonymous with binge-drinking, and most Americans who battle with alcohol addiction say that the problem started while they were in their late teens or early twenties.

Although the consequences of alcoholism are well-known throughout the world, far less attention is paid to the causes. Family history, mental health and social pressure are just a few of the risk factors which everyone should take into consideration if they choose to drink. Hopefully, the more people know about the causes of alcoholism, the less likely they will be to develop a problem.