

# Is Alcoholism a Disease?

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From backyard barbecues to national holidays, alcohol has become as normal as apple pie and hot dogs. We socialize with alcohol, celebrate with alcohol and medicate with alcohol. While the use of alcohol is normal and embedded in most cultures, there is also a very dark side to this beverage. This dark side has been labeled as "alcoholism."

There is hardly a family that has not been touched by the wrath of alcoholism. From the out of control uncle to the mother who partakes in the afternoon while the children are at school, alcoholism has become a normal part of our lives. From family members to social elites, the scourge of alcoholism has cast its ugly shadow on every corner of our society.

We have developed a multi-billion dollar industry to identify and treat it. There is an abundance of programs available to help control one's drinking. There are Twelve-Step groups, treatment centers and a vast resource of educational books and materials to help contain one's alcoholic tendencies.

Most of us have been led to believe that alcoholism is a genetic inheritance that some people are born with. We are taught that those who have this genetic malady have only one recourse—to never allow alcohol to touch their lips again. They are labeled with the dreaded scarlet letter of being the "alcoholic."

While this way of thinking has become normal in our culture, the irony is that most of what we know about alcoholism is completely false. Alcoholism is not a disease and there is no genetic dysfunction at the source of it all. Most of this story is a "made-up" scientific myth. Here is the truth about alcoholism and all addictions.

Alcohol addiction was the first addiction to be identified and treated because it was the most prevalent and obvious addiction. In the 1930's, Bill Wilson and Dr. Bob started the Alcoholics Anonymous movement. This idea was based on the assumption that there was a flaw in some people's biology that made them unable to stop drinking once the first sip of alcohol touched their lips. Despite billions of dollars in scientific research and decades of blaming one's biology, there has never been an alcoholic gene discovered nor has there ever been proven a biological flaw that forced someone to pick up the first drink of alcohol and continue drinking into an out of control state.

In 1960, E. M. Jellinek, a biostatistician at Yale University, published a book called *The Disease Concept of Alcoholism*. Jellinek's initial work consisted of a study of less than 100 men. From these results he concluded that alcoholism was definitely biologically induced. Shortly after, the *American Medical Association* and *American Psychological Association* jumped on board and proclaimed that alcoholism was a disease of one's own biology. Western scientific medicine was now the "gate-keeper" of all knowledge in regard to alcoholism and addictions in general.

If one bird flies in the wrong direction than many will follow. Jellinek was the one bird and we have all flown far off course. First off, let's examine the term "alcoholic." The word "alcoholic" is not a scientific term and should not be studied by scientists who pride themselves on measured and quantifiable results. The word

**"alcoholic" is a subjective term based on who is using it. For instance, magnesium and copper are elements that can be measured and calibrated. Alcoholism cannot be measured. Who is to say that the person who only drinks on weekends is an alcoholic or not? Who is to say that the person who has his two martinis every day at five o'clock is an alcoholic? Who is to say that the person who starts each day with a "Bloody Mary" cocktail and continues to sip alcohol all day long, but never loses control, is an alcoholic or not? You cannot measure "alcoholic?" Scientists and medical doctors have been trying to measure every aspect of an alcoholic's biology (genes, proteins, insulin etc.) for decades now. The problem is that you cannot quantifiably identify who is an alcoholic and who is not because it is not measurable.**

**Then let's examine the term "disease." What does it mean to have a disease? Ever since the *American Medical Association* and scientific medicine came to dominate our lives some one-hundred years ago, all disease has been classified as biological in origin. This means that your biology is responsible for how healthy or ill you are. Under this definition, you are not responsible for your health but you can only accept the genes that you were given. Is it any wonder why no auto-immune disease has ever been cured by scientific Western medicine?**

**Disease is a multi-function imbalance. Certainly, if you drank a quart of motor oil your biology will be negatively impacted. But most diseases of our time are not biologically caused. They are based on the thoughts we are thinking, the repression of our emotions and our own stress levels. Alcoholism is no different. Alcoholism is a choice that some people make as a way to mood-alter. That is right! Alcoholism is a choice; it is not a disease.**

**In fact, the knowledge that we have about all addictions stems from the myth that alcoholism is a disease. From gambling addiction to information addiction, petting your dog addiction to surfing the internet addiction, all addictions are a choice as a way to medicate yourself from not feeling any uncomfortable feelings. Just like with alcohol, there has never been found a chocolate addiction gene, a text message addiction gene or even a shopping addiction gene. We know that these addictions exist and they do the same thing to medicate a person from feeling their feelings. A teenager with text message addiction is no different than an out of control alcoholic. Only the means by which one medicates himself tends to be different.**

**Most of us have never learned how to feel our feelings so we have found ways to mask those feelings. That is what all addictions do—mask feelings. Addictions are a relationship with something that we have chosen to cover up our emotions. An addiction could be a substance (like alcohol), an emotion, a behavior, a thought, a person or an object that is used to hide one's feelings. Nowhere in the equation is there any errant gene, biological allergy or failure of the body.**

**You might look at addictions as a balancing scale. On one side of the scale are our emotions and on the other side are our addictions. The more one is able to feel his feelings, the less he needs to use an addiction to numb out with. However, the more one chooses not to feel, the more addictions he will have and the stronger those addictions will be.**

**The problem arises when we look at this old model for healing addictions. We have been stuck on the wrong side of the healing scale. We have been blaming a**

drug or a substance for our problems. Most have been trying to control the drug or the behavior. We should be working on the other side of the scale learning to feel all the emotions that we have held tightly inside. We have been in a state of blame. Healing happens when we take responsibility and enter into a state of acceptance for the choices we are making. The Western scientific world has a fear of emotions. Scientific medicine derives from the rational brain. The rational brain sees emotions as useless and only for the weak. This is why addictions cannot be healed from the current theory and model. Science is scared of emotions.

Healing from alcoholism does not come when we substitute one addiction for another—like sobriety. Sobriety is just another term to say that one is now addicted to "control." The addiction pattern continues, only this time the individual gets high from control rather than from being out of control with alcohol. While it may benefit some to learn how to stay in control, this method is not healing and it certainly is not "Recovery." The *Recovery Movement* has little, if anything, to do with recovery. This method teaches one to be addicted to control. You now use control as your drug of choice.

In fact, this errant scientific biological model has become the foundation for all addictions. From sugar addiction to crystal meth addiction, workaholism to romance addiction, our biology is being blamed for all of it. We remain frozen in place because the original definition of addiction still blames our biology. Healing cannot begin until we go back to the origin and change the definition of addiction. There is an incredible amount of momentum that has been created taking us in the wrong direction because the initial cause has been misdiagnosed.

Healing will happen when you learn how to feel your feelings that you have been fearing. Expression of emotions is the gateway to healing, not attending meetings for life or carrying around the "alcoholic" label forever. Being labeled as "sick" with an "incurable" disease (like alcoholism) is a losing proposition. This is the "victim-conscious" way of seeing the world. Blaming one's biology for the choices that he is making keeps one stuck in place.

There is a solution but it is not to be found at a Twelve-Step meeting or in a scientific laboratory. Healing happens when we begin to follow nature's rhythm and let our emotions out. Alcoholism is not a disease, only a misguided bird flying in the wrong direction. When you begin to change course you will see that healing is as simple as birds flying south in winter (in the Northern Hemisphere) and back north in the summer. Nature is our strongest guide. Follow nature and you will heal; ignore nature and you will suffer.