

# “I Can Stop Anytime, On My Own”

■ by Doretha McBride, MA, LCSW, CADC



## April is National Alcohol Awareness Month

How many times have you heard someone respond, when being confronted with their problematic alcohol use, “I can stop anytime, on my own”? How many times have you heard they were successful in their attempt, if it was ever attempted at all?

This mindset is a common dilemma facing families of alcoholics. It may be due to an attitude of ambivalence towards drinking. It may be associated with perceived stigma of treatment and requesting assistance. And because alcohol is a legal drug, society tends to minimize its dangers - until it hits home and becomes unmanageable. Although a person knows there is a problem, they enjoy drinking. This creates an inability to decide to stop without assistance.

### Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism On the Rise

Alcoholism is not concerned with one’s status, education, age, or upbringing. Alcohol abuse and alcoholism must be taken seriously! Just take a look at these alcohol-related statistics, which alarmingly continue to rise!

- Alcohol poisoning kills six people daily (CDC).
- Three in four alcohol poisoning deaths involve adults ages 35 to 64, and most were men. (CDC)
- The majority of alcohol deaths are among non-Hispanic whites. (CDC)
- 100,000 people die each year from alcohol-related causes: drinking and driving crashes, other accidents, falls, fires, alcohol-related homicides and suicides. (NCAAD)
- Of the 3.9 million Americans who received treatment for a substance abuse problem in 2005, 2.5 million were treated for alcohol use. (Drug Free World)
- In 2013, 24.6 percent of people ages 18 or older reported they engaged in binge drinking in the past month. (NIAAA)
- Alcohol abuse is the third highest cause of death in the in the U.S. (NIAAA)
- Teen alcohol use kills 4,700 people each year –more than all illegal drugs combined. (MADD)
- Drunk driving costs the United States \$199 billion annually. (MADD)
- Kids who start drinking young are seven times more likely to be in an alcohol-related motor vehicle accident. (MADD)

(Statistics from <https://talbotcampus.com/index.php/resources/disease-info/2015-alcoholism-statistics/>)

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## Alcoholism is Progressive and Affects Every Area of Life

Alcoholism is a problem that, without help, gets continuously and progressively worse. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) identifies it as a progressive disease.

Alcoholism causes a myriad of problems which affect every area of the alcoholic's life. They have lost the trust of others and they don't really trust themselves. Alcoholics engage in distorted thinking, defending or justifying their behavior while blaming others for resulting problems. Denial is a key factor relative to this addictive behavior; the alcoholic refuses to admit they have a problem and makes excuses for the unseemly behaviors. They're the last to know the problem exists and will resist help, even if it means losing their loved ones and all possessions. After all, they are familiar with this lifestyle and have an underlying fear: "What will happen if I stop?!?"

## Mental, Physical, & Spiritual Aspects

There is no question that heavy, long-term drinking is harmful and destructive to the whole person. It has significant implications for one's mental, physical, and spiritual health. The combination of these three characteristics creates alcoholism.

**Obsession** - the mental force that drives alcoholism.

This impetus communicates to the brain 'I not only want the alcohol, but I really need it'. This nagging thought won't allow the alcoholic to focus on normal daily activities. It is always in the back of the mind driving its way forward, wanting to take total control.

**Compulsion** - the physical aspect of alcoholism.

This unconscious mechanism and uncontrollable impulse causes repeated drinking in an attempt to avoid unacceptable thoughts and desires that create anxiety. It is what is seen - the getting up at all hours to have it, the 'going to any lengths' to get it, the internal force that leads the alcoholic to act against their will as a result of the obsession.

**Self-Centeredness** - the spiritual aspect of alcoholism.

This aspect has eased God out of the equation. The alcoholic is motivated by obsession and compulsion to get what is believed to be needed/deserved to provide a perceived sense of balance and calm, at any cost! No matter who it hurts, what is lost, or who pays!

## Getting Help is Critical

It is my prayer that, with this information, you will be armed for the fight against alcoholism. Alcohol withdrawal can be deadly so, once identified, it is important to get help. The alcoholic will likely need an assessment by a trained therapist to determine the level of care that's needed. A health assessment and a motivational interview will provide valuable information needed by the trained therapist to make the proper decision. Prior to therapy, hospitalization in a detox facility may be the best option. But always...always seek assistance. Because, if they could 'stop anytime, on their own', they would.

Initially, seeking assistance may cause feelings of hopelessness, shame, and fear of failure. But Jesus looked at them intently and said, "Humanly speaking, it is impossible. But with God everything is possible." (Matthew 19:26 NLT)

*Doretha McBride is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and Certified Alcohol and Drug Counselor. She enjoys working with clients in our Schererville, IN and South Holland, IL office locations.*



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