

Ask Your Therapist

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Treatment for Alcohol Addiction

This is a controversial topic. There are 2 approaches: the strictly medical approach and the “recovery” model.

The medical approach is very straight-forward. The alcoholic enters a medical facility for medical treatment. They are denied alcohol and go through some sort of withdrawal, depending on how serious their alcohol addiction is. In severe cases, they can have the “DT’s” (delirium tremors), hallucinations, body sweats and cramping, sleeplessness and pain. It is difficult, painful and not to be done lightly. Then they are either released to go home or they may be referred to a community residence to live with others who are trying not to drink. In those residential programs, they may be exposed to the recovery model of sobriety.

The “recovery” model offers a two-prong approach of alcohol withdrawal plus a detailed program to help the addicts examine why they drank and how not to drink in the future. The most well-known of these programs is Alcoholics Anonymous and its off-shoots. There are others such as Smart Recovery, and programs based on specific religious groups.

The first step in the recovery process is to stop drinking. People can choose to do this at home under medical supervision, in a medical facility or in a detox center. That process is immediately followed by a detailed program of self-examination to determine the roots and motivations of the drinking, support to stay alcohol free, and education on the supplementary skills the alcoholic may not have gotten in their drinking lives such as telling the truth, communication skills, boundaries and personal accountability.

Although the recovery models focus on supporting the addict not to return to the addiction, there are also support systems built in for the spouses and other family members to help them learn how the addiction has impacted their lives.

For many recovering alcoholics, sobriety has clear boundaries. They believe they may never take another drink again for to do so is to risk becoming out of control with their drinking again, something too horrible to consider risking. Some alcoholics believe they can drink “socially”, in a very moderate, controlled way. This is a controversial topic in the world of recovery.

What does seem to be true is that, if a person stops an addiction without understanding the root of that behavior, the addictive behavior may show up again in another addictive behavior. In the old movie “Clean and Sober” Michael Keaton’s sponsor is shown eating large quantities of sugary foods and when asked, admits he is still an addict but has just moved his addiction to food!

Next month we will explore how alcohol addiction impacts families. Please consult your health care provider if you think you may have a dependence on or addiction to alcohol or other substances.

To read all the prior Ask Your Therapist columns go to www.krishnabai.com where you can also send Krishnabai a general question for her column.

Krishnabai, MSW is a therapist in Ashby and Wellesley Hills where she sees adults, older teens and couples. The core of her work is the discovery and expression of the Authentic Self. She focuses on the identification, expression, and resolution of emotions, commitment to honesty and the use of remedial education and information. The Ashby Center for Counseling 978-827-1181.