Debunking Medical Myths: Alcohol Addiction

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Alcohol Addiction
It's not just a choice.

12.6%
Of adults exhibit high-risk drinking behaviors

Almost 1 in 8
Adults 18 and older in the US struggle with alcohol use disorder

Genetics of Addiction
- Alcohol use disorders are approximately 50% heritable, meaning they can be passed down through an individual’s DNA.
- Individuals with genes that lead to a “low-level response” to alcohol experience lessened intoxicating effects and are more likely to have escalated drinking behaviors, which has been related to future issues with heavy alcohol consumption.
- Family, twin, and adoption studies have demonstrated the heritability of alcohol dependence and alcohol abusers disorders:

What Happens in Your Brain
- Drinking: Alcohol releases dopamine, triggering the reward center of your brain and causes it to associate alcohol and the settings you consume it in with pleasure.
  - Chronic Use: The more you drink, the more alcohol you need to release the same amount of dopamine and get the same reward. Chronic use disrupts the balance between excitatory and inhibitory signals in the brain.
  - Craving: In an addicted brain, the stimuli for drug consumption (such as a stressful day) release dopamine, causing you to seek out alcohol.
  - Lack of Control: The pre-frontal cortex, our brain’s regulatory center is under-active in an addicted brain, making it less able to overcome cravings.
  - Withdrawal: Symptoms can be severe and require medical intervention.

How to Get Help
- Brief interventions
- Motivational interviewing
- Support groups
- FDA approved treatments:
  - Disulfiram
  - Acamprosate
  - Naltrexone

REFERENCES