

ALCOHOL

Alcoholism, also known as alcohol dependency or alcohol use disorder (AUD), is one of the most common substance abuse issues in the world. In the United States, it is estimated that about 18 million adults suffer from some form of alcohol use disorder. Because alcohol is legal, people often develop alcoholism without necessarily realizing they have a problem—or the realization may occur very slowly. However, if someone is abusing alcohol, it often quickly begins to affect other areas of their life and can spiral out of control. Help for alcohol use disorder is available at Soul Surgery’s addiction and mental health center in Scottsdale, Arizona.

Some warning signs of problematic drinking that either are, or can lead to, alcoholism are blackouts or short-term memory loss, choosing to drink rather than deal with work or family obligations, wanting secrecy or privacy while drinking, extreme mood swings, and feeling hungover *any time* the person is not drinking. There are also many questions that a licensed medical professional, such as the physicians at Soul Surgery, may ask to determine whether a patient is suffering from alcoholism. These may include diagnostic questions from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM): Have you continued to drink even though it was making you feel depressed or anxious or adding to another health problem? Have you lost interest in other activities and hobbies since you started drinking? Have you felt an urge or craving to consume alcohol? Or have you gotten into situations while drinking that increased your chances of harming yourself or others (i.e., drinking and driving)?

If a person is struggling with alcohol use disorder, they may make the difficult and life-changing decision to become sober.

Detoxification and withdrawal from alcohol dependency can be very serious, and those in recovery may benefit from professional treatment and assistance. Alcohol Withdrawal Symptoms (AWS) can include severe anxiety, irritability, nausea, headaches, seizures, delirium tremens (also known as DTs, involving sudden changes in the nervous system), blackouts, nightmares, fevers, rapid heartbeats, hallucinations, and in some cases can be life-threatening. Detoxification from alcohol usually starts roughly eight hours after the patient has last had a drink. The process of detoxification can last up to a week, or possibly even longer, depending on the severity of the patient’s previous alcohol use.

Under medical supervision, these painful withdrawal symptoms can sometimes be eased through medication-assisted treatment. Medication-assisted treatment is never a one-stop fix, but part of a broader, integrated treatment plan, that would vary according to the individual patient’s history and needs. There are four medications primarily used to assist in alcohol withdrawal: naltrexone, acamprosate, disulfiram, and topiramate.

Naltrexone is a medication that blocks opioid receptors in the brain, thereby blocking alcohol’s euphoric effects. It reduces craving and reduces relapses for many patients working towards long-term sobriety. Vivitrol is one FDA-approved, naltrexone-based medication, which can be administered as a monthly injection by a physician.

Once a patient has achieved sobriety, acamprosate (brand name Campral) is another medication-assisted treatment option. Acamprosate stabilizes chemical signals that would normally be affected by alcohol withdrawal. Acamprosate eases symptoms of alcohol withdrawal like insomnia, restlessness, anxiety, and dysphoria.

Disulfiram (brand name Antabuse) can also be taken once a patient has detoxified and achieved sobriety. On this medication, when a patient ingests even a small amount of alcohol, they will experience headaches, nausea, and other unpleasant side effects. Naturally, this dissuades patients from relapsing.

Topiramate is a medication that works to increase inhibitory neurotransmitters (like gamma-Aminobutyric acid, or GABA), while simultaneously decreasing the stimulatory neurotransmitters (like glutamate) that are normally affected by alcohol.

All of these medication-assisted treatments are available at Soul Surgery, not as stand-alone “quick fixes,” but as part of integrated treatment plans for alcohol dependency.

Whenever alcohol is negatively impacting other areas of a person’s life—whether it be their work, their family, or their interpersonal relationships—it may be time to seek help. Fortunately, help is available.

At Soul Surgery in Scottsdale Arizona, a wide variety of progressive, evidence-based, integrated treatments are available. Soul Surgery has fully licensed Intensive Outpatient Programs (IOP), Partial Hospitalization Programs (PHP) and Outpatient (OP) programs that offer treatments such as counseling, psychoeducational group work, twelve-step work, bio movement, IV therapy, craniosacral therapy, bio feedback, eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR), medication-assisted treatment, and many other services. These integrated treatments are deeply important to a patient’s success; it is important that all aspects of a patient’s health are cared for, and Soul Surgery is equipped to support patients in all aspects of their mental, emotional, and physical recovery. Soul Surgery’s team of licensed medical professionals and counselors trained in substance abuse issues are available to help each individual patient determine a course of treatment that will positively impact their physical, mental, and emotional health, leading to long-term sobriety and positive life changes.