

Five Things I've Learned About Alcohol Use Disorder That Might Just Save Your Life

1. **Alcohol use disorder must be self-diagnosed for any treatment to be successful.**

People who are afflicted by AUD are complex and unique individuals, with different personality types and variable sets and severity of symptoms. In fact, one of the *symptoms* of AUD is denial and dishonesty regarding alcohol consumption and how it is affecting your life. This makes diagnosis difficult. ONLY YOU can concede to yourself if you have AUD, and there is not one singular way to come to this decision. If your alcohol use causes disorder to your life in any or multiple ways- physical, mental, and emotional health, routines, relationships, finances, etc. then you have the right to diagnose yourself and seek solutions. NO ONE gets to be the judge of you, nor do you have to prove yourself to anyone. There is no blood or DNA test to empirically prove the diagnosis. You are the one who must come to terms with your drinking patterns and recognize if those have become unsustainable for you. Then, and only then will your next steps have the POWER of choice. Some people can make the necessary correction and choose to live sober on their own and have success. For most of us though, this proves to be impossible, and when that is the case, the most powerful thing you can do is to ask for help.

2. **Abstinence is not the full treatment for AUD, but it is the necessary beginning.**

No one can live sober if they don't first stop drinking. Detoxing from alcohol once a physical dependence upon it has been developed is not only incredibly difficult, but alcohol withdrawal can be dangerous, even fatal. Ranging from mild to severe, symptoms can include headaches, anxiety, insomnia, excessive sweating, upset stomach, heart palpitations, high blood pressure, increased heart rate, difficulty walking, tremors, confusion, hallucinations, seizures and delirium. Doesn't sound too inviting, does it? Well, the good news is that symptoms usually peak within 24-48 hours after your last drink and resolve entirely within a week, sometimes lasting up to a few weeks. Professional help with detoxing is advisable, even if your symptoms are mild. If your dependency level is severe, you should **definitely** seek medical detox. Safely detoxing from alcohol is critical to being able to move into a sober lifestyle. Just because physical detox is hard, doesn't mean that once it's over sobriety is going to be easy. We must address the underlying conditions that return us to drinking if we are to remain sober and build and maintain fulfilling and successful lives. This is why I've created Sober & Alive. We teach you the tools to handle the remaining difficulties that reveal themselves once the physical dependence on alcohol has been adjusted.

3. **The disorder itself and its legitimacy are widely misunderstood, even in recovery circles.**

People with AUD are not just weak willed or inherently rotten irresponsible people. We are also not "choosing to drink or not drink." Alcoholism is recognized as a disease. It earned this classification based on the criteria that it is progressive, chronic and fatal. No one chooses to have disease symptoms if they have a disease. The more current classification as I've been referring to it is "alcohol use disorder." I like that, because I think it describes the condition well. We become very disordered in our lives around alcohol use. We may have done rotten irresponsible things, but this behavior is one of the results of the disorder, it is not our true nature. In fact, the unbearable guilt and shame over our unmanageable behavior is part of the disorder that returns us to drunken drinking. People with AUD are overdrinking to soothe not only a dependency developed on alcohol, but a deeper systemic problem, that left misunderstood and untreated appears to be hopeless. Abstinence, in and of itself does not solve or remove the myriad miseries that surface when alcohol is removed. These troubles are best understood and tended to in unity with other people who have recovered from them. This is one reason that the 12th step model has good success post in-patient treatment (about 10% better than without according to a study conducted by Stanford in 2020). Yet, long-term sobriety even in AA remains elusive and rare (also hard to track). Sober & Alive is all about healing, continued healing, improvement and evolution. It is a daily self-sustaining practice paired with supportive community that cultivates enrichment, not dependence.

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4. **Coming to the desire to live sober is a BIG deal, and one that people who don't have AUD can never seem to fully understand**

AUD affects about 6% of people, which seems like a small percentage, but is effectively still a lot of people! Yet, most folks just don't get it. Lots of people overindulge sometimes, so they think that someone who has AUD is just overdoing it and needs to cut back. They imagine anyone could just stop or moderate, like they do. In common culture, the idea of living completely sober is radical. This has been changing slowly over the last many years, but refusing a drink that is offered is uncomfortable and often met with insistence, "oh c'mon, just one..." or questioning your refusal, "why aren't you drinking? Are you sick, or pregnant?" Or the worst, the look of sympathy, with the "oh that's so good for you, what a good thing you're doing..." Yuck. No one wants to have to explain their choice not to drink, especially when it is so personal, and often painfully embarrassing. The idea that someone is somehow weak or a goody-goody if they don't drink is pervasive. Yet, social pressure is real, and very active around drinking. For those of us who have had AUD, our self-identity is usually wrapped up in drinking culture, so suddenly being a non-drinker is totally weird! Not to mention, the effect that alcohol has on those of us who develop AUD is overwhelmingly compelling, and the hope of getting that wonderful euphoric relief is persistent and regenerative, even when it doesn't give us that effect anymore. At Sober & Alive we know the importance of a relatable sober community. We offer meaningful spaces where people can talk about this stuff, hear feedback from other sober people about how they handled these types of situations, and how to be successful navigating the difficulties of a sober lifestyle in a world that drinks.

5. **People who have AUD are remarkably similar, in more ways than drinking.**

While there are no two people *exactly* alike (even identical twins), I have found truly astonishing similarities in my deepest self with other people who have AUD. I like to call people I relate to like this "alkies." Calling myself and others who identify themselves as "alcoholic" is fine, but there is a fondness and lightness earned in the nickname that I have come to adore. In the 36 years that I have attended recovery spaces and listened to hundreds of thousands of alkies and others share their experiences with drinking and sobriety, I've seen a set of traits emerge that are identifiable and relatable. Some of these are- extreme sensitivity causing over-reactivity, hyper intelligence concomitant with fear that we're stupid, grandiose dreams and perspectives simultaneous with self-hatred for not living up to our ideals, crippling self-consciousness and self-doubt, overblown but fragile ego, impostor syndrome, secret shame, dishonesty that pairs with an overactive guilty conscience, wanting to be so special and important but wilting under scrutiny... Drinking relieved all of that for a time. Now we can relieve and repair all of that with the Daily Alignment Practice, and it really works! With continued application, all of those traits and many others can be transformed into positive qualities, almost superpowers. Oversensitivity becomes acute perceptivity with useful honest responses. Self-consciousness becomes insightful self-awareness. As we repair our ego we can relate and connect to others in truly meaningful ways. By understanding ourselves we become empathetic and helpful. We can do big and small things and feel excited and peaceful and regulated. We learn accountability and reparations and abolish shame. When we practice the Sober & Alive method together it is strengthening, enlightening, and uplifting. The alkies that I have come to know are brilliant, vibrant, dynamic, honest, sympathetic, caring and generous people. I can't imagine not having these people in my life. We may have come to sobriety despairing, self-hating, and confused, but that changes. We have a craving for more, and we can find that more that we've always been looking for at the bottom of a bottle without a drink. These changes happen over time and with practice, but they do occur, much to our shared amazement.

Sober & Alive is all about evolution and balance. We use nature as our guide and model to connect to the "more" that we once sought in a drink. As you breathe, your heart beats, your eyes blink, you don't even think about it. It can be that easy. I've created Sober & Alive to be able to share my sober experience and evolution in a simple, transmittable and integrated way. If you have the same disorder that ordered me to sobriety, I'd like to welcome you to Sober & Alive, to find your authentic self and the life that you deserve.