

# Harmful Drinking

The Mystery Unfolds...



“ Drinking *per se* is not a defect of character, but it can be harmful in certain people. You can judge drinking and harmful drinking apart by consequences. Rest assured, the condition is treatable at any stage. ”

Dr. Sadaqat Ali

## Alcohol is a Selectively Addicting Drug >>>>

Most of us have been exposed to alcohol at one time or another. Drinking is in fashion all around. What we don't realize it that alcohol is a selectively addictive drug. For most drinkers alcohol is a harmless social beverage. But an estimated 10% of alcohol users fall prey to its addiction. For the minority who get addicted to alcohol, it becomes a nightmare for their whole family. Alcoholism is a term that I, prefer not to use, now. Instead I use the term Vicious Drinking as opposed to simply *Drinking*.

## Drinking >>>>

With a little intake of alcohol, the consumer feels energetic, joyful and confident. Performance on difficult tasks improves. The world seems a better place after a drink or two. The average drinker stops here. A built in deterrent seems to be working in most people. Moreover, the benefits of drinking are usually available only with low doses of alcohol.

## Vicious Drinking >>>>

When sedation begins to override the stimulation with higher doses, the pleasure is all gone and what we are left with is annoyance and intoxication with slurred speech and staggering gait. We will study the gradual change from one stage to the other further on.

Have you ever spoken to a loved one about this state? You might not have for one is often embarrassed to speak about such a thing. But if you did...what was his response? Have you ever shown him a video of how he looks, speaks and acts when under the influence? Try this with his prior permission and with respectful compassion.

Drinking per se is not a defect of character, but it can be harmful due to many factors. There is nothing strange about it. Even eating can be harmful when it's mindless and dumb. When I entered the field of counseling for the families afflicted by drinking in 1979, most scientists seemed to believe that there were only two kinds of people in the world: alcoholics, who could not drink safely and the rest of us who had nothing to worry about when drinking. Now, we know the reality of drinking is not so black and white. Anyone who drinks above a certain amount is at a greater risk of developing a

**“Alcoholism is a Bio, Psycho and Social disease. It starts in the body, affects the mind and destroys the life. Psychological damage is the result and not the cause of the alcoholism. It is progressive and fatal if untreated.”**

wide range of problems. So, I will talk about Social Drinking and Harmful Drinking ranging from Over Drinking, Dumb Drinking, Dependent Drinking and Vicious Drinking. The reasons behind this drinking spectrum vary depending on the people and places you visit, their mindset, ethnicity and genetics.

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Strangely enough when we look at our biochemistry, there is an elaborate arrangement for drinking as if we were supposed to drink. And a few of us have a liver enzyme malfunction which makes us unfit to drink. Normally alcohol breaks down to Water and Carbon Dioxide with an intermediate product, Acetaldehyde. This intermediate product is a toxin, which is produced slowly but eliminated quickly. In some people, due to a genetic trait, an error in metabolism occurs, so Acetaldehyde is produced quickly and eliminated slowly. Due to this double jeopardy, Acetaldehyde accumulates in blood. Don't forget, Acetaldehyde is toxic! And toxins affect our moods. More on this in the following pages. Keep reading.

Some people tell me that they like to take a drink at dinner, a glass of wine; then they ask me, "That's not a problem, is it?" The answer is very simple. It's not a problem, if it's not a problem...at least not at that time and not for most people. If it makes them more functional, then it's not a problem; rather it is a solution albeit a short term one. But if you have made unsuccessful attempts to cut down, that means there is an issue about your drinking. If there

is an annoyance after drinking whereas if all was well, you should actually be pleased, then there is a problem. If people can see you changing in front of their eyes; you become more and more irritable, louder and nothing seems right to you, then there is a problem. If you feel guilty about your drinking and need a drink to open your eyes in the morning, then too, there is a problem. And finally, there is a rule of thumb:

**If somebody points a finger at your drinking,  
there is no doubt about it.**



### **It's Harmful Drinking.**

How people cross that invisible line during their journey starting from Social Drinking to Vicious Drinking is quite mysterious. I will try to illustrate it with the story of an imaginary character Akram and how his drinking career shaped up during the last 10 years. I will elaborate it graphically starting with the Standard Feeling Chart (Fig.1). The mood swings and the emotional symptoms that develop in Over-Drinking, Harmful Drinking, Dumb Drinking, Dependent Drinking and Vicious Drinking are shown in successive diagrams on the following pages.

There are a few people who have pathological depression or

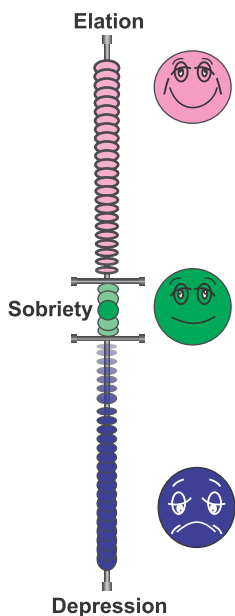


Figure-1: Shows the feeling range of a normal person who does not drink. He enjoys neutral mood on most of the days, shown as green smiley. At times he is quite happy represented by pink and unhappy shown as blue smileys.

**Figure 1: Standard Feeling Chart**

elation at the beginning of their drinking career. For the sake of simplicity I will sideline these people at the moment. Right now I will focus on the majority who start drinking within the area of the Standard Feeling Chart. So to speak, they are emotionally well-balanced people. The thing to remember is that alcoholism does not discriminate; it seems to hit approximately 10% of people, be they in a normal state, clinically depressed or clinically elated, when they first start using it.

I will use the Feeling Chart to record the drinking experiences of Akram from the beginning of his drinking habit to the first phase of the disease, and finally to the last, devastating stage, Vicious Drinking. Here is how the story goes.

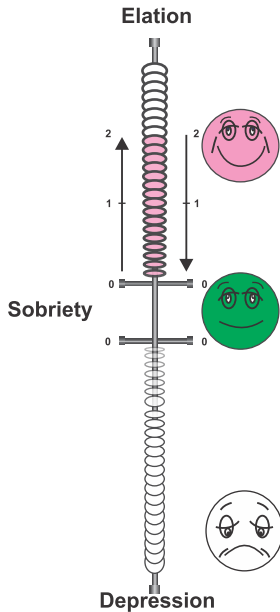


Figure-2: When a person drinks for the first time, his mood is elevated, from neutral to (+2). When the effects wear off, he moves back to where he started from with no emotional cost. That is the harmless phase of his drinking career.

**Figure 2: Mood Swing With Drinking**

One day Akram is invited to a dinner. His boss offers him a drink which he cannot refuse. He is a little tired after a day's work, but after the drink he feels pretty good. Mood wise, he moves from neutral or zero (0) to (+2) on the feeling chart. "This is great! How come I did not know about it before?" He has done a behavior with an immediate reward. Such a behavior is repeated and develops into a habit cycle--- a cue, a behavior and a reward. The cue (a time, a place, certain people, emotions and a preceding activity) triggers the desire for a behavior (drinking), and the reward (pleasure, relaxation and energy) together complete; a habit cycle. Things like alcohol and chocolate that deliver a reward quickly

and make us feel better, are quickly established as habits. It means the brain learns to encode it for the future use.

Soon he makes a profound discovery: If one drink makes him feel good, then two or three could be even better! In terms of the Feeling Chart, that first drinking experience was a mood swinger in a positive direction. There was no damage, there was no emotional cost. His experience with alcohol was mind bogglingly happy.

Then the second phase of his "love affair" with alcohol starts. He had learned to trust alcohol; these mood changes are now sought frequently. It was not possible to predict his destiny at this point. An average person, however, takes about 10 years before sinking into alcoholism; 90%, however, enjoy a natural immunity to this disease.

Akram feels better with one, two, three drinks; with the fourth, he feels terrific (+4)! Again so far he always returns to the mood state he started from; he is not yet paying any emotional cost for his drinking. He now believes in the power of alcohol religiously.

One day he announces to his wife, "Sadia, I got that business deal! Let's throw a party." He over-drinks and the next morning he wakes up with a sickening hang-over. His head is throbbing, his stomach was queasy, and he is very thirsty. But Akram can only



recall the euphoria of the night before. It was a real big mood swing from ground zero to elation (+6) (Figure 3). Physically he feels bad, but psychologically it was a safe return right back to the starting point. He remains in this stage for many years. The majority of the drinkers never pass this stage but Akram does. His drinking career is

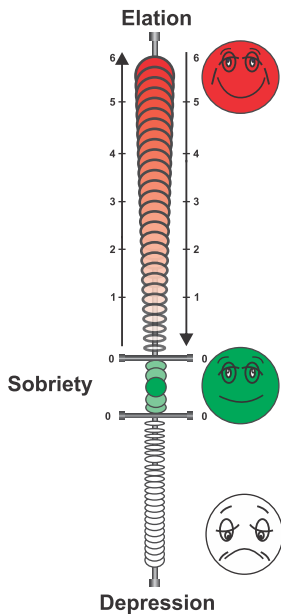


Figure-3: A social drinker drinks too much on occasions, for a big mood swing (+6). He awakens in the morning with a hang-over. However, it was a safe return with no emotional cost involved. Most drinkers do not go beyond this stage; but some do.

**Figure 3: Mood Swing With A Bang**

progressing by leaps and bounds. His terms of the association with alcohol were now beginning to change. He does not know it, but a change in his liver has taken place. However, his liver function tests were still normal.

He is getting more than ever obsessed with the idea

that alcohol will always come to his rescue, no matter what. At the same time he has an inkling, that he needs to set some boundaries for his drinking and sets drinking rules for himself. But he always

**“ At some point, the drinking pattern begins to diverge; those who are destined to become alcoholics start to drink more and more often. They ensure the supply and can’t stop once start. ”**

breaks these rules. He has now become very rigid about the drinking time. This is the signal of true dependency on alcohol. Now *Akram* has to take more drinks to get the same effect. He often exhibits bizarre or odd behavior. Emotionally, now he has started slipping back to below normal on the Feeling Chart.

Akram still thinks that things are fine and dandy, but he has become harmfully dependent. Feeling Chart (Figure 4) shows the emotional cost he is now paying. In terms of mood swing he does not stop at ground zero but descends into depression (-1). The emotional costs signal the beginning of the end of good times for him and the family. There is a significant and progressive deterioration in his physical and psychological health. Violent outbursts have begun to take place and his relations with the family are jeopardized. The carefree days are gone,

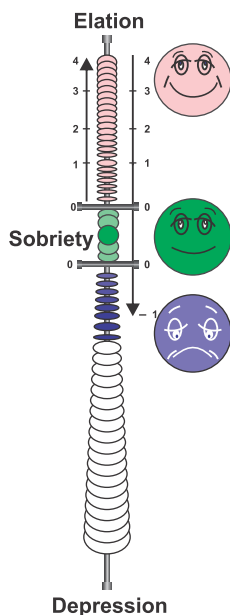


Figure-4: This is the harmful drinking phase. He drinks a lot and exhibits bizarre behavior. Then he slips back below normal (-1), while returning from this “adventurous” drinking episode. Even people around can see the price tag.

**Figure 4: Harmful Drinking Begins**

but he is only dimly aware of this fact. People around him can see the tip of the ice-berg, but the pathology under the skin remains obscure.

Intellectual defenses are rising to justify the drinking even at such an emotional cost, and his rationalizations are hiding his own self sabotaging behaviors. The tragedy is that these defenses continue to work even more successfully as the illness progresses. Soon he is completely out of touch with reality.

Figure 5 tells the story of his impulsive and reckless drinking. Eventually this emotional distress becomes a chronic condition. He now starts feeling

awful when he is not drinking. His behavior has gone beyond bizarre to outrageous and his slight twinge of remorse has become a painful stab. The emotional pain is harder to bear. His self-worth is at an all time low. Akram's feelings regress towards a kind of blanket self-hatred. The aftermath of each

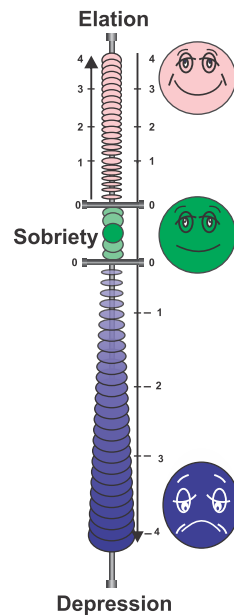


Figure 5: This is vicious drinking; he pushes himself up by gulping down alcohol to (+4) but while returning, he crashes into annoyance and depression (-4). There is huge emotional cost. He feels awful miserable when he is not drinking.

**Figure 5: Into Vicious Drinking**

new drinking episode echoes with self recriminations; "I am no DAMN good!"

Akram is a very sick man by now. Personality changes are evident --- bursts of temper, violence, hostility and moroseness. His personal hygiene is not up to the mark. His weight loss is obvious. In

terms of mood swings he pushes himself up to elation (+4) but while returning from this trip, he does not stop at ground zero and slips beyond that level into the depths of depression (-4)..

Alcoholism is a cunning and baffling disease, as they say; it has many clever ways and means for sustaining itself. Despite the negative changes it brings...the kind person becomes angry or hostile; the happy person becomes sad or morose; and the perfect gentleman ends up becoming a jeering and violent louse. Yet the

**“Alcohol is very rich in calories too. These calories cannot be stored and are to be consumed at once. So, the energy “kick” is its most deadly characteristic.”**

drinking continues and a vicious cycle begins. Now it is mandatory to drink to override the pain of toxins in the blood. This internal punch hits very hard. He has to choose between two things: drink or face the music. This is the mystery behind the Vicious Drinking that is regularly mistaken for a mere psychological compulsion to drink. He is damned, if he drinks, but he is still damned, if he does not..

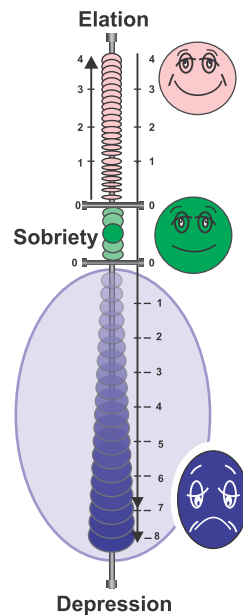
Phase three is marked by a change in his life-style comprising of (a) growing anticipation of the welcome effect, (b) an increasing rigidity around the expected time of drinking, and (c) a progressive desire to obtain larger and larger amounts of alcohol.

Back to *Akram*:

His marriage slowly and painfully deteriorates, friendships dissolve and interest in his work wanes. Alien solutions are sought and ruminated, "Maybe if I change my spouse, or my job, or city, this whole thing would clear up!" The blame games are at their climax..

Figure 6 depicts the climax of Vicious Drinking. See (-7). Continued excessive drinking has brought on pathological suicidal feelings. "I am no damn good" is followed by "I am so rotten that I might as well end it all". If the course of the disease is not interrupted, the end of this is suicide, either slowly with alcohol, or in a more direct fashion. Point (-8) is the last stop on the Feeling Chart.

Figure 6: Ongoing intoxication brings anxiety, guilt and shame. Point (-8) on the feeling chart is the last stop on this journey – alcoholism. He can no longer achieve the happy high. He drinks just to feel normal. A double jeopardy.



**Figure 6: Facing Alcoholism Further Along The Road**

## Question > > > >

Why couldn't he see what was happening to him? Answer: He could not because he was on the wrong side of his eyeballs. Everybody is looking at his outrageous behavior and pointing a finger at his drinking. But Akram does not admit that his life is a mess; or that his drinking is harmful. He is sure that other people or things are causing all the trouble, if any. "Sadia is the culprit, if I leave her I'd get better." Or "I can't stand my job any more, it's driving me nuts! I have to drink." He is progressively unable to keep track of his own behavior; he begins to lose contact with reality; his defenses continue to grow and become more firmly entrenched.

**Remember The Key Word:**

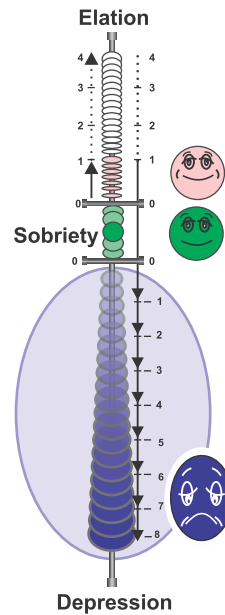
**"DENIAL"**



**And You Need Denial Management Counseling**

Now there is an ever-present mass of free-floating anxiety, guilt, shame, and remorse. He cannot feel good whether he is drinking or not. At this stage he can no longer achieve the happy high of old days.

Figure 7: He remains in turmoil all the time. If he drinks enough he feels a little better; when he does not drinking, he is like a man on fire who is ready to jump into deep sea waters. The funny thing is that he does not know how to swim.



**Figure 7: Alcoholism – Into Deep Sea Waters**

Figure 7 shows that he remains in a state of turmoil all the time. He feels miserable when he does not drink. He does not feel good when he drinks. Now, he is no longer emotionally able to start any drinking episode from the "ground zero". He does not go from "good" (+1), to "great" (+4). Now he has to start from the painful side of the graph (-8) and drink just to feel normal (0).

A Chinese phrase says, "First the man takes a drink, and then the drink takes a drink, and finally the drink takes the man." Another powerful defense mechanism, PROJECTION swings into action. This is a process of unloading self-hatred onto others. Akram sees himself as surrounded by hateful nasty people. "If they would shape up, he would be all right!" His boss is a pain, Sadia [his wife] has something against him, the kids are driving him crazy, and the



mother is pushing him to the limit. What he seems to be saying is "I hate you all". What he is actually saying is, "I hate myself." But he does not know this. And nobody around him knows it either. This is the climax of alcoholism in Akram's family.

Now, if he were sitting in front of you and you asked him," Can you quit drinking all by yourself? The answer most certainly would be ----"Oh, yes I can stop anytime, I'm sure of it. I have done it many times!" ..... He doesn't realize how much he is revealing in that one sentence.

## The World of Drinking is a Mad, Mad World. > > > >

People suffering from Vicious Drinking are not aware of the disease, which has been insidiously growing inside of them. From the outside, it appears as though the person is lying. That is why they are labelled as liars --- even pathological liars. The people around

“

In alcoholics up to 2/3 of the total energy requirement of the body may be fulfilled by alcohol. That is why alcoholics often neglect food and are malnourished.

”

him are shocked and unable to understand as to why he simply doesn't do something about it.

While rationalizations and projections are psychological impairments in their own right, three new bewildering conditions

enter into this gloomy picture --- Blackouts, Repressions and Euphoric Recall. A blackout is the hardest thing for people around him to understand. If we experienced a period of time when we walked and spoke and made telephone calls and parked the car, and later couldn't remember any of it (even after talking to witnesses), we'd go to a doctor at once. But people with Vicious Drinking don't want to explore it too closely. Instead, they adapt, to cover up these occurrences by filling in the blanks with confabulations.

Over a period of time, a person with Vicious Drinking develops the ability to repress unwanted and shameful memory material. They literally shut it out of their minds. The third component of the delusional system, Euphoric Recall, may well be the most devastating of all. They cherish their drinking episodes, no matter what. This is Euphoric Recall. Anyone who dares to differ with them is a nag.

His marriage in jeopardy, his job on the line, his health on the decline. But what can we do? If we leave him alone with the bottle; --  
- he will perish miserably.

## While this is Happening to the Affected Individual, What is Happening to You? > > > >

How does it feel to live with someone who lives only to drink? He looks straight into your eyes and denies the ground realities. And your reaction is, "Maybe I'm going crazy!" He is "sincerely" out of touch with reality. He passes cruel remarks and your self-image progressively deteriorates. On top of this you have to assume the role of a protector, like making apologies and excuses to his employer and friends for his antisocial behaviors. You give him

a clean slate every time something happens. You provide short term solutions to his long term problem. You continue to pick up the pieces after each episode while growing more protective, controlling, and blaming. Your behaviors help him to avoid the consequences of his abnormal drinking. Please don't mind... I do not mean to offend you. But this is how it happens. You are also caught in a downward spiral. You begin to feel as if you are totally alone in the world.

If you don't get help for yourself at this stage, you move on to co-dependency. Codependency is shadow-alcoholism. Yet there

“The alcoholism teaches all the tricks to its victims to make them excellent story tellers, so as to trick their families. It also sings melodious lullabies for them, so they can't hear any wake up calls.”

is another very important and rewarding role available to you, a role that can reverse this process of deterioration. This is the role of the intervener.

## How to Tell if Someone You Know is an Alcoholic? > > > >

Alcoholism is a serious health problem today, directly affecting one million people in Pakistan. It means that another nine million also drink. There are millions more who are suffering from Shadow Alcoholism, as a result of living under the same roof. Now

the point is: "Why don't alcoholics realize what is happening to them and quit drinking?" The answer is simple, they can't. Even many of those around them can't see what is happening to the person drowning himself in alcohol. They are also oblivious to the fact that they are doing plain futile things to turn him around. In the past they have been asked direct questions about their drinking patterns like:

1. "Have you ever started the day with a drink?"
2. "Have you ever been drinking alone?"
3. "Have you ever been drinking a fifth a day?"
4. "Have you ever felt remorse after drinking?"

Today we know that they are not only reluctant to answer these questions, but incapable of doing so, because their nervous system is messed up. You have to use other methods. You have to inquire about his changing life-style and its link with alcohol. Is there evidence of growing tolerance to alcohol? Does he need more alcohol to get the same welcome effect? Does he carry alcohol with him all the time and use all his wit and cleverness to hide the embarrassing number of bottles?

If someone you love has a drinking problem you must suspect alcoholism. But if you want to make an accurate diagnosis answer these questions:

1. Does he change noticeably when drinking?
2. Do people show concern about his drinking?
3. Do you worry all the time about his drinking?
4. Did he ever embarrass you by his drunkard behavior?
5. Did you notice observable and measureable damages resulting from his drinking?

If you answered "yes" to even one of these questions, he is into Vicious Drinking. Please get help before it is too late!

## Conclusion > > > >

If you learn only one thing from what you have read so far, let it be like this: You are not responsible for the disease of alcoholism

“ There is nothing special why alcoholics drink?  
The short answer is: they drink for all the  
reasons others do. If you keep exploring  
alcoholism all the mysteries will unfold. ”

that has taken hold of the person you care about. You have been feeling guilty unnecessarily. Alcoholism is like Diabetes. You have never done anything that could have resulted in that person's illness. But rest assured, you can do a lot, a whole lot... to turn him around. However, you might be hesitant to approach him because he is difficult; you feel that he will refuse, like always. Intervention is the key to this problem.

## Intervention is the Key > > > >

In the past most people believed that nothing could be done with alcoholics until they had "hit bottom," but today intervention is getting alcoholics to accept help much earlier. Families, friends and even colleagues and bosses learn intervention skills and play a pivotal role to increase treatment seeking behaviors

in the patient. As a group, you work on your subject feelings regarding the consequences of his drinking and very smartly transform them to an objective reality in the form of hard data under

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the guidance of an interventionist. Intervention data is based on incidences which took place as a result of drinking. Then they gather together to present the intervention data to the person with love and respect and ask him or her to accept treatment.

Families are also part of treatment. For them, the treatment means retraining their brain. It means replacing old habit-pathways with new ones. It means learning new skills to solve the challenges that addiction brings up. It means learning to solve problems through breakthrough conversations. It means knowing ones style under stress. It means knowing when it is prudent to take a safe exit and come back to resolve the matter.

**RULE:** Never negotiate with someone who is under the influence of alcohol especially when you are under the influence of anger. Stop demanding abstinence or moderation. Instead, ask him to get help.

Addiction is a brain disease which is characterized by intense craving, along with compulsive drug-seeking even in the

face of devastating consequences. This happens because over time addiction affects multiple circuits. Inhibitory control over behavior replaced by impulsiveness and the will power is reduced. In addition, depression, anxiety disorders, bipolar often co-occur with addiction and need to be managed. Still, nearly all individuals believe at the outset that they can conquer their addictions on their own.

Because drug addiction is a chronic disorder, research indicates that active participation in treatment is essential. Moreover, recovery is not just about abstinence. It is about rebuilding precious relationships that have turned angry and bitter. It is about learning to be happy and joyous again.

Treatment includes recognizing the forces that are perpetuating addictive behaviors. It also includes harnessing and replacing them with vital behaviors. It means becoming 'The one who can see,' so that one is no longer blinded and out-numbered by the unseen. It means increasing one's personal ability, harnessing one's social capital and redesigning the reward and punishment system. That's particularly important because people tend to believe that addictions can be eliminated through punishment. I would ask you rely on rewards. In addition, changing the things in the environment can help encourage vital behaviors and discourage vicious behaviors. Learning to prepare for one's Crucial Moments; moments of low will power and high temptation is an important skill in recovery. It's important to understand that will power is variable and gets affected by things such as hunger, anger, loneliness and tiredness. Recovery can really be sustained by fine-tuning your recovery strategy assuming the role of a Scientist and a Subject at the same time. Developing these skills is the antidote to addiction. This is what rehabilitation is all about. Rehabilitation means true and long-term empowerment.

You have waited too long for a miracle, here it is:

**Get Help! ...**

Because he won't!

Drinking *per se* is not a defect of character, however, it can silently turn into a devastating disease – Alcoholism. But rest assured, it is treatable at any stage. Willing Ways is a state of the art facility for Alcoholism, Addiction, Obesity, Gambling, Infidelity, and Psychiatric disorders.

**Admission is not Mandatory;  
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**Here is a link to a video produced by Willing Ways Pakistan**

You can watch this video on:

[www.drinking.willingways.org](http://www.drinking.willingways.org)

## **Alcohol is a Lie**

**first ever video on Alcoholism  
Produced in Pakistan**



Characters in this video have been played by real people who are now in recovery. They are our success stories. They are our miracles. Willing Ways (Pvt.) Ltd. Pakistan is a state-of-the-art facility for Counseling in harmful drinking.

We treat with respect and dignity. We give you a set of Vital Behaviors. We give you tools to strengthen your crucial moments. We work on you and you produce results. Willing Ways can help.



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