



# Alcohol Addiction

When One of the Most Socially Accepted Substances is Hardest to Quit

## What is Alcohol Addiction?

**Alcohol addiction** is a chronic brain disorder marked by compulsive drinking despite escalating consequences. Because alcohol is legal, socially accepted, and available everywhere, the line between heavy use and dependence blurs until the damage is undeniable. Over time, the brain adapts to require alcohol just to feel normal, making it extremely difficult to sustain sobriety without long-term support.

## What Does It Look Like?

- **Drinking That Defies Every Promise to Stop**  
They swear they will cut back, then drink the same amount or more within days.
- **Physical Dependence the Family Can See**  
Shaking hands, sweating, irritability, or sudden illness when they go without a drink.
- **A Life Reorganized Around Alcohol**  
Routines, relationships, and responsibilities quietly rearrange to protect their access to drinking.
- **Escalating Tolerance With Diminishing Awareness**  
They consume amounts that would incapacitate others and insist they are fine.

## Why Does Alcohol Addiction Become Chronic?

When someone has been through treatment more than once and keeps returning to alcohol, the resulting pattern of chronic relapse is difficult to untangle with willpower alone.

- 1) **The Brain Adapts and Withdrawal Becomes Dangerous**  
Prolonged use rewires the brain's stress and reward systems. Stopping without medical support can be life-threatening.
- 2) **Short-Term Programs End Too Quickly**  
A few weeks of treatment may address acute withdrawal, but it can't rebuild the thought patterns, relationships, and coping skills that sustained the drinking.
- 3) **Untreated Mental Health Issues Drive Relapse**  
Most chronic alcohol relapsers have co-occurring mental health conditions that go overlooked or untreated.

### **Prevalence:**

**29.1%** lifetime prevalence of AUD in U.S. adults<sup>1</sup>

### **Co-Occurrence:**

**Over 40%** of adults with AUD have a co-occurring mental health condition<sup>2</sup>

### **Relapse Risk:**

**40-60%** of individuals relapse within the first year after treatment<sup>3</sup>

*Sources: <sup>1</sup> Grant et al., JAMA Psychiatry (2015): National Epidemiologic Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions III. <sup>2</sup> Castillo-Carniglia et al., The Lancet Psychiatry (2019). <sup>3</sup> Moos & Moos, Addiction (2006).*

## Long-Term Treatment for Alcohol Addiction

Alcohol rewires the brain's stress response and reward systems over years of chronic use. A short-term program might manage acute withdrawal, but it can't undo that level of neurological adaptation or address the **underlying depression, anxiety, and trauma** that sustains the drinking. Families watch their loved one leave short-term programs appearing stable, only to relapse within weeks.

Our **long-term, progress-based model** gives the brain and body time to stabilize while building the coping skills, accountability, and behavioral patterns that replace alcohol's role. Clients advance when they demonstrate real change, not when a calendar says their time is up.



*"Families tell us their loved one looked great when they left the short-term program. Two months later, they were drinking again. That is not a simply failure of the person. That is a failure of the timeline."*

 **Brook McKenzie, LCDC**  
CEO, Burning Tree Ranch



## Dual Diagnosis Treatment for Alcohol Addiction

When alcohol addiction is treated in isolation, the conditions that sustained the drinking remain active. Depression, anxiety, PTSD, personality disorders and other **mental health disorders co-occur with alcohol use disorder at significantly elevated rates**, and each condition reinforces the other. Treating one without the other leaves the cycle intact.

At Burning Tree Ranch, we create an **individualized treatment plan that addresses co-occurring conditions** alongside alcohol dependence through evidence-based therapies including CBT, DBT, EMDR, and trauma-informed care, building toward lasting, sustainable sobriety.

### Dual Diagnosis Defined:

The presence of **both a substance use disorder and a mental health condition** occurring together. Effective treatment for dual-diagnosis addictions must address both aspects simultaneously.



### Have Other Treatment Programs Missed the Deeper Issues?

Burning Tree Ranch is the Nation's only authentic long-term treatment program for chronic relapse. Call us at (866) 287-2877 or visit us online at [www.BurningTree.com](http://www.BurningTree.com).

**Disclaimer:** Burning Tree Ranch aims to enhance the quality of life for individuals battling substance use and mental health disorders through well-researched and professionally reviewed content. Our publications focus on the nature of behavioral health conditions, available treatments, and their outcomes. Reviewed by licensed experts, our material is informative but not a replacement for professional advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always seek the guidance of a licensed health provider for any medical or clinical concerns.