



[Choosing Not To Drink](#)

April 28th, 2011

by [Lisa Frederiksen](#)

One of the common misperceptions heard time and again is that alcohol abuse and alcoholism are one in the same. They are not.

Yes, both cause chemical and structural changes in the brain which result in drinking behaviors (e.g., fights with loved ones, DUIs, poor work or school performance), but with alcohol abuse, a person can change their drinking patterns to fall within “moderate” drinking limits or they can choose not to drink. With alcoholism, a person cannot drink any amount. Period. But until they seek recovery, the choice of how much and when to drink is beyond their control. Check out these related posts to better understand these statements:

[Controlled Drinking Can't Work for an Alcoholic](#)

[Alcohol Use / Abuse / Dependence \(Alcoholism\) — What's the Difference?](#)

But the real point of this post is to share the fact that a person who chooses not to drink — whether it's stopping after a period of alcohol abuse or not starting in the first place — does not mean he or she is an alcoholic. Nor is being an alcoholic a brand of shame. In fact, an alcoholic in recovery is to be celebrated for having the courage to fight and treat a chronic, often relapsing brain disease — a disease unlike any other; a disease that requires not drinking in order for treatment to be successful.

And why am I making these points? To help those who feel they have to comment on a person's decision to drink or not to drink (e.g., “Really? Are you sure?”), to STOP the comments; and to help those who are worried about their own drinking patterns and what stopping may mean, to better understand it does not necessarily mean they're an alcoholic, but if they are an alcoholic, then stopping is their only choice.

For all concerned — those making or thinking the comments and those worried about what the comments imply — it's helpful to learn more about alcohol abuse and alcoholism, and for that, I suggest the following:

[Click here to download a free copy of NIAAA's Rethinking Drinking booklet.](#)

[Or, click here to immediately access the NIAAA Rethinking Drinking website](#) for a wealth of information, tips for cutting down, and a quiz to anonymously assess your (or a loved one's) drinking patterns in order to better understand whether those patterns qualify as alcohol use, abuse or dependence (alcoholism).

POINT OF CLARIFICATION added 4.30.11: With alcoholism comes the other four characteristics of the chronic, often relapsing brain disease of addiction: cravings, loss of control, tolerance and physical dependence. With alcohol abuse, those are not present. The drinking behaviors are the same with both, and it is those that are intolerable — especially for their impact on others.

Choopersguide is committed to the recovery of individuals who suffer from the [disease of alcoholism and drug addiction](#). We are active in the [recovery advocacy movement in the State of Florida](#) and host an addiction treatment and addiction information resource site with over 30,000 treatment provider listings for treatment programs, methadone clinics, [suboxone doctors](#), [drug and alcohol counselors](#) and [interventionists](#). Additionally, we post [addiction treatment and research articles](#) and national and international [addiction related conferences and recovery events](#).