

Introduction

Alcohol Related Brain Damage (ARBD) is the term used to describe the range of symptoms that can occur as a result of alcohol misuse. Alcohol can affect the body's ability to get and store nutrients such as thiamine. Thiamine is a B vitamin and is important for the healthy functioning of the brain. Excessive intake of alcohol can therefore cause short and long term memory problems.

ARBD is also sometimes described as Korsokoff's Syndrome or Wernicke's Syndrome. ARBD can affect both men and women. Adults can develop ARBD at any age.

Recovery

ARBD is sometimes described as a form of dementia but it is important to realise that 25% of people with ARBD make a full recovery with a further 25% making a significant recovery (Smith and Hillman 1999). It is also important to realise that dependent on the severity of ARBD that 25% of people will make no recovery; however, people can be supported to develop strategies and coping mechanisms to live with the symptoms associated with ARBD.

How it can affect people

There are a number of ways in which ARBD affects people. These include:

- fatigue and lack of motivation
- being confused about time and place
- having difficulty with attention and concentration
- having difficulty retaining new information (verbal and visual)
- having mood changes, such as becoming depressed, irritable, anxious or angry
- having difficulty remembering recent events, sometimes called short term memory loss
- showing no interest in things and lacking spontaneity or motivation
- filling in memory gaps with made-up information.

There can also be physical problems. These include:

- difficulties with balance and co-ordination
- damage to your liver, stomach and pancreas
- problems with your eyesight – for example, double or blurred vision or involuntary eye movement;
- numbness, pins and needles, burning sensations or pain in your hands, feet and legs

- changes to blood pressure

How to Help Yourself

- Stopping drinking alcohol will stop ARBD getting worse and is critical to recovery
- Eat healthy foods
- Talk to your Doctor about vitamin supplements
- Ask for professional help
- Use notes, diaries, photo galleries and checklists to help you remember

How to Help Someone Who has ARBD

- Support the person to stop or cut down alcohol intake
- Try and help the person to eat a good, healthy diet
- Try to ensure the person has talked to their Doctor about Thiamine or other treatments
- Get professional help if available
- Be hopeful and positive about the person's recovery
- Be patient
- Give information in short clear statements
- Keen decisions/choices clear and simple
- Use notes, diaries, photo galleries and checklists to help person remember

Useful Contacts

Drinkline: 0300 123 1110

Freephone Helpline for:

- People worried about their own drinking
- Family and friends of someone who is drinking
- Information and self-help materials
- Advice on where to go for help

www.patient.co.uk/support/drinkline

Alcohol & Drugs Action Team (ADAT)

Each area in Scotland has an alcohol and drugs action team. Contact information will be available from your GP practice.

Alcoholics Anonymous: 0800 917 7650

Helpline and support organisation for people concerned about their drinking

www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk

Useful Reading

Alcohol Related Brain Injury – A Guide for Families Alcohol Forum (2015)

http://www.drugs.ie/resources/publications/guides_and_support_booklets/



Penumbra is a leading Scottish voluntary organisation working in the field of mental health. We provide an extensive range of person-centred support services for adults and young people.

We also campaign to raise awareness of mental health issues and reduce the social stigma attached to them.

If you would like more information or have any further questions about any other Penumbra services please contact:

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