

Dealing with alcohol withdrawal symptoms

ALCOHOLISM

By Vivian Agaba

Some people are so addicted to alcohol that it becomes part and parcel of their lives.

Dr Johnson Richard Kubuzigu, a medical officer at Kassanda Health Centre IV in Mubende district, says if an individual drinks alcohol heavily frequently, he or she may suffer both mental and physical problems, and when the individual suddenly stops drinking or cuts back on how much alcohol they consume, he will suffer from a condition known as alcohol withdrawal.

Alcohol withdrawal symptoms

Paul Nyende, a psychologist working at Makerere University School of Psychology, says that alcohol withdrawal manifests through depression, frustration, anger, fury, restlessness, failure to sleep (insomnia) and difficulties in interpersonal relationships.

Other symptoms are pain in the different parts of the body, including joints, headache and, in extreme cases, convulsions could lead to death.

But for people who consume alcohol occasionally, it is unlikely they will suffer withdrawal symptoms when they suddenly stop.

Nyende advises people who manifest withdrawal symptoms to visit hospitals such as Butabika Hospital, which have specialists

in managing alcohol withdrawal symptoms.

Treatment and management

Dr Byamah Mutamba, a consultant psychiatrist at Butabika Hospital, points out that alcohol withdrawal symptoms are a fraction of a bigger problem, which is addiction or dependence on alcohol.

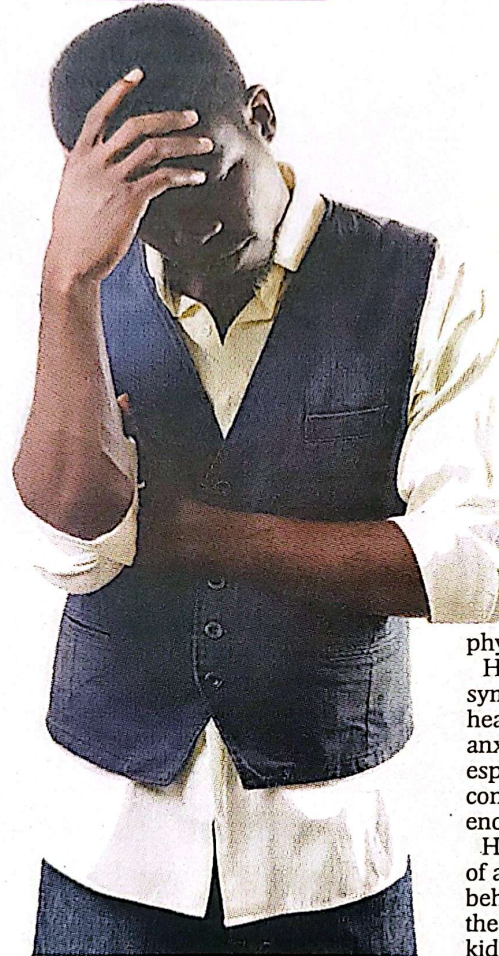
He explains that when an individual consumes a lot of alcohol frequently tries to stop, the body is destabilised. There is a feeling of discomfort and the person may relapse to drinking. He adds that once the person drinks again, they will stabilise, the sweating and discomfort will go away.

"However, alcohol is toxic and will progressively destroy the body, and mind, and the person's condition can get worse," Dr Mutamba says.

"This is when the person starts saying unco-ordinated statements, or having hallucinations. The person must be rushed to hospital for treatment," he adds.

At the hospital

Dr Mutamba, who is also the head of department drug and alcohol unit at Butabika National Referral Hospital, says people going through alcohol withdrawal usually present with mental and physical challenges and, therefore, when the individual reaches the hospital, complete assessment of both mental and



It is advisable that individuals seek medical attention

IMPORTANCE OF DETOXIFICATION

Detoxification or detoxication is the physiological or medicinal removal of toxic substances from a living organism, including the human body.

Dr Byamah Mutamba, a consultant psychiatrist at Butabika National Referral Hospital, says detoxification, a medical process of treating symptoms of alcohol withdrawal, is the best way that allows the person to safely stop alcohol, adding that it must be done at a health centre under the

supervision of specialists. Another form of treatment includes use of medication, which is done under the care of a health worker.

He pointed out that counselling and rehabilitation of these patients is also part of the long process of care, and depending on the health status of the patient, treatment for the alcohol problem may take about two weeks, while rehabilitation goes on for about three months for a person to fully recover.

physical status is carried out.

He says alcohol withdrawal symptoms come with co-occurring health problems, ranging from anxiety, mood disorders and ulcers, especially if the person has been consuming alcohol without eating enough food.

He says overconsumption of alcohol does not only affect behaviour, but also other parts of the body, including the heart and kidneys.

"During treatment, we do not focus on alcohol alone. We carry out a

complete assessment of the patient's mental and physical status to help them deal with the health and social problems," he says.

Treatment and management are done in two phases, the immediate treatment, especially when the person has come in with injuries or low blood sugar and needs emergency attention, and long-time treatment, which involves detoxification and counselling to deal with health, social and occupational problems associated with alcohol abuse.