**What Exactly Is a Functional Alcoholic? Does it Exist?**

Is it really possible to be a functional alcoholic? The definition of an alcoholic generally includes the loss of control when drinking and an inability to complete certain tasks due to alcohol consumption. So is it really possible for someone to be an alcoholic and be truly functional?

[When I was drinking and using](https://www.addicted-to-sobriety.com/drug-addiction-i-never-thought-it-would-happen-to-me/), I suppose I was a functional alcoholic – or at least I thought I was. I went to school and I got good grades. I woke up every day and usually did what I was supposed to do. But my drinking and using was getting out of control so quickly; it was just a matter of time before I would forfeit all of my responsibilities because I couldn’t drink and be highly functional at the same time. I suppose as long as I was alive, I was a ‘functional’ alcoholic. I was functioning, just not very well.

**Are Functional Alcoholics Really Functioning Well?**

The term functional alcoholic implies that these people live productive lives, and alcohol isn’t a huge problem for them. If a person shows up to work every day hungover, are they functional simply because they show up to work? What if they show up to work drunk, but they can still fulfill all of their tasks at work?

Just because someone has a home, a job, and a family doesn’t mean that they are functioning well. Just because a person doesn’t miss too many obligations doesn’t mean that they are functioning at the level they should. They may still be drinking too much and might be unsafe or suffering some health issues due to their drinking.

**Problems With The Term Functional Alcoholic**

One of the biggest problems with this label is it gives the person the impression that they don’t need to change. It’s just another way for someone to stay in denial. Maybe they don’t even realize they need help.

When I was drinking, I made sure that I went to school, got good grades, and excelled athletically. In some ways, I was very functional, and this is precisely what allowed me to keep drinking for many more years. It was as if I couldn’t possibly have a problem as long as I was going to school. I couldn’t possibly have a problem as long as I was playing sports in college. But the fact is I did have a problem, and this problem existed long before I decided to seek treatment.

**How We Can Help Our Alcoholic Family Members and Friends**

What if someone had said to me, “Hey, I know you are going to school and seem to be doing well, but you don’t seem happy, and you seem to be drinking and using too much”?

What if someone had actually approached me and talked to me about my alcoholic behavior and my drinking? What if they had insisted I get help? I don’t know if it would have made a difference. I also know that in the beginning, I hid my drinking and using very well. It wasn’t a secret that I drank, but many people didn’t know how much I was drinking.

However, some people knew that it was becoming a problem and didn’t really say much. Maybe they asked me about it once and dropped it, or they didn’t ask at all. If we allow people to continue destroying themselves simply because they are ‘functional’, it is a disservice to the people we care about who need help.

Most functional alcoholics are drinking enormous amounts of alcohol and have thus developed a tolerance. This is part of the reason people may consider them functional. The fact that someone has a high tolerance and may not seem drunk does not mean that the amount of alcohol they are drinking isn’t dangerous; we shouldn’t ignore these alcoholic symptoms. It is still doing damage to their body internally, and it is still possible for them to consume too much alcohol and fall into a coma or die.

It’s not something to take lightly, and I think by calling someone a functional alcoholic, we are minimizing how dangerous alcoholism really is.

So if someone you care about seems to be drinking too much – find a way to say something. Let them know you’re there for them and willing to help however you can. Do something. Say something.