What is the treatment for alcoholism?

There are numerous individual treatments for alcoholism. Relapse prevention uses methods for recognizing and amending problem behaviors. Individualized drug counseling specifically emphasizes short-term behavioral goals in an attempt to help the individual reduce or stop the use of alcohol altogether. Cognitive-therapy techniques, like helping the individual with alcohol dependence recognize what tends to precede and follow their episodes of alcohol use, are often used to address alcohol abuse. Some treatment programs include drug testing. Twelve-step recovery programs like Alcoholics Anonymous are individualized drug-counseling methods. Motivational enhancement therapy encourages the person suffering from alcoholism to increase their desire to participate in therapy. Stimulus control refers to a treatment method that teaches the alcohol-dependent person to stay away from situations that are associated with alcohol use and to replace those situations with activities that are contrary to using alcohol. Urge control is an approach to changing patterns that lead to drug or alcohol use.

Friends and family members of alcoholic individuals have often developed a codependent relationship with the substance abuser. Specifically, they often feel compelled to either help their loved one secure alcohol or to repair situations caused by the alcoholic's alcohol use. Social control involves family members and other significant others of the alcoholic in treatment.

For people in the first stage of alcohol use (having access, but not having yet used alcohol), preventive measures are used. Therefore, limiting access to alcohol or other drugs, addressing any risk factors of the alcohol consumer or family, as well as optimal parental supervision for youth and expression regarding expectations are often recommended. The approach to those who have experimented with alcohol should not be minimized by mental-health professionals, since infrequent use can progress to the more serious stages of alcohol use if not addressed. Therefore, professionals recommend that the alcohol-consuming individual be thoroughly educated about the effects and risks of alcohol, that fair but firm limits be set on the use of alcohol, and that the user be referred for brief counseling, a self-help group, and/or family support group. People who have progressed to the more advanced stages of alcoholism are typically treated intensively, using a combination of the medical, individual, and familial interventions already described.
While group therapy can help teens stay sober, groups that include a number of teens who also engage in disordered behaviors can actually tend to increase alcohol use in this age group. Family interventions for alcoholism that tend to be effective for teens include multidimensional family therapy (MDFT), group therapy, and multifamily educational intervention (MFE). MDFT has been found to be quite effective. Longer-term residential treatment, often called rehab, of three to five months that addresses peer relationships, educational problems, and family issues is often used in treating alcoholism in teens.