

Who can I contact for help?

Substance Abuse Service Helpline

 (844) 804-7500

Alcoholics Anonymous

 www.aa.org

National Council on Alcoholism & Drug Dependence

 (800) 622-2255

Families Anonymous

 (800) 736-9805

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

 (800) 273-8255

Alcoholics Anonymous—Online Chat Meetings

 aa-intergroup.org/directory_chat.php

Alcohol Withdrawal and Detox



What is alcohol withdrawal?

Alcohol withdrawal occurs when someone has developed a tolerance to alcohol and then stops drinking, causing an intense, sometimes life-threatening reaction.

Who is at risk for alcohol withdrawal?

People build up a tolerance for alcohol as they drink larger amounts and drink more often. As tolerance increases, the same amount of alcohol does not cause the same effect, so people will sometimes drink more as a result. This can lead to a dependence on alcohol, so that drinking is necessary just to feel normal. Once a person has a dependence on alcohol, quitting alcohol may produce symptoms of withdrawal.

What are potential symptoms of alcohol withdrawal?

- Body tremors or shakes
- Anxiety
- Nausea
- Fever
- Body aches
- Trouble sleeping
- Feeling irritated
- Seizures

The amount of time someone goes through withdrawal depends on its severity. In some people, it last for only a few days, and in others it may last a little longer.

When should I see a doctor about alcohol withdrawal?

It's important to talk to your doctor if you are planning on going through alcohol withdrawal, because your doctor will be able to let you know whether medications and/or inpatient care is recommended. Your doctor may also be able to give you advice on how to structure your withdrawal, so you are as comfortable as possible, giving you the greatest chance of success.

Another reason it is important to seek professional help is that anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts, or other effects on mental health may develop while you are going through withdrawal. Having someone to talk to, along with medication if needed, can be very beneficial when going through treatment.

How is alcohol withdrawal treated?

Alcohol withdrawal treatment depends on the needs of the individual, so it's important to talk to your doctor to make sure you go through withdrawal safely.

For more mild withdrawal, you may just need to go to a quiet place, in a positive and supporting atmosphere, with access to healthy foods and lots of fluids. It is important to have a support system when going through withdrawal, but some people may prefer to isolate themselves once the process is underway to limit distractions.

If the withdrawal is more serious, you may need to stay in a controlled environment with trained professionals. This process of treating withdrawal is called detoxification (detox). The process of detox uses several medications that help treat the symptoms caused by withdrawal. Medications help control the effects of nausea, dehydration, seizures, insomnia, and other symptoms. While a person is undergoing detox, their vital signs are monitored regularly. Vital signs include blood pressure, heart rate, breathing, and body temperature.

If medical detox is not needed but you have relapsed before, you may want to try social detox, where you go to a facility designed to help people go through withdrawal, either by simply offering a space for people or by providing peer and professional support services.