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***If Veterans don't help Veterans, who will?***

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# Addiction Resources

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## What is Withdrawal?

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Because we understand how much addiction to alcohol, heroin, or opiates can affect each person's health and mental state, we hope that you find a treatment center to help you or a loved one lessen the symptoms of withdrawal. This begins by helping the body adjust to the detoxified state. What's more, patients who receive private and confidential treatment in an outpatient clinic may complete their entire process in less time than a typical in-patient rehab program. As a web resource, we want to help you understand the nature of withdrawal and how a holistic substance abuse therapy program could help you get your life back on track.

## The Definition of Withdrawal

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The term withdrawal refers to the physiological and psychological changes that a patient experiences when he or she suddenly stops consuming an addictive substance. When your body is accustomed to high levels of an addictive substance such as alcohol or drugs, your brain chemistry changes. You should expect, at the very least, that your withdrawal symptoms will feel the opposite of being intoxicated with alcohol or another drug of choice.

## Understanding the Symptoms of Alcohol Withdrawal

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Some patients enter a detox program to stop or reduce their level of alcohol consumption. Here are common symptoms of alcohol cessation:

- Signs of the heightened autonomic nervous system. (This part of your brain controls your organs and all essential functions, including breathing, blood pressure, heart rate, and digestion). During withdrawal, you could experience high blood pressure, severe sweating, increased heartbeat, and/or shaking/tremors.
- Heightened activity level in the central nervous system (CNS), which may produce motor seizures
- Hallucinations or delirium in severe cases of withdrawal

While you may have these physical symptoms of withdrawal, you can also experience other types of discomfort and distress, including feeling agitated, anxious, throbbing pain in the temples or another form of headache, and sensitivity to light and sound. Like a hangover, you can also experience nausea, vomiting, and difficulty sleeping. Because alcohol serves to inflame the body and creates a toxic byproduct in the liver called acetaldehyde, all the usual experiences you encounter during a “hangover” could manifest while in withdrawal.

## **Understanding Symptoms of Opiate Withdrawal**

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Some patients go into detox centers because they want to stop consuming heroin or opiates, and they may experience a variety of physical and psychological effects during withdrawal as well.

### **Early-stage Withdrawal Symptoms:**

- Agitation
- Anxiety
- Muscle aches
- Increased tearing
- Insomnia
- Runny nose
- Sweating
- Yawning

### **Late-stage Withdrawal Symptoms:**

- Abdominal cramping
- Diarrhea
- Dilated pupils
- Goosebumps
- Nausea
- Vomiting

## **The Timeline of Withdrawal**

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When you or a loved one is suffering from an addictive disorder, there will be many expectations, however realistic, of how the withdrawal process works. Having enough education about the detox process can help. It helps to feel that you’re in a state of readiness for the detox process and that you’re committed to the entire treatment program. As the physical and psychological effects of withdrawal begin to decrease, your body can become more receptive to therapy and counseling. Please understand that alcohol and each type of drug will have its own timeline for withdrawal, and each person’s body adjusts to the lack of their addictive substance differently (even if a patient goes through detox multiple times over his or her lifetime). Furthermore, in a detox program, some addicts

will be withdrawing from numerous substances at once, which feels like a significant change to their brain and the rest of their body.

For alcoholics, stopping or substantially reducing alcohol consumption will immediately stop their body's suppression of neurotransmitters. They will begin to rebound, which puts the central nervous system into a state of hyper-excitability.

An alcoholic's withdrawal period will last for a minimum of 7 to 10 days.

According to one source, the stages of withdrawal for opiates are as follows:

- Short-acting opioids (e.g., heroin): Onset of opioid withdrawal symptoms 8-24 hours after last use; duration 4-10 days.
- Long-acting opioids (e.g., methadone): Onset of opioid withdrawal symptoms 12-48 hours after last use; duration 10-20 days.

## **Managing Withdrawal**

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During the first stage of withdrawal, there should be doctors and nurses available to a patient 24 hours a day. The psychosocial components of withdrawal should occur after a patient has completed the worst symptoms of withdrawal, of course, because he or she wants to avoid relapse. In the clinical setting, there should be no pressure to exercise or radically change one's diet while the body adjusts to the withdrawal state. For the patient, staying in a comfortable environment and having around-the-clock access to medical treatment, counseling, and other social supports, when needed, can help. People who are still withdrawing are typically residing separately from those in the counseling phase of detoxification. However, for all participants of detox, there could be a significant disconnect between what the patient expects the withdrawal process to feel like and what actually occurs when he or she participates in the program. A patient can also manage the withdrawal process through a program that provides medication to help stabilize the body during the period when the physical symptoms are most potent. Every person will react differently to withdrawal from one or more addictive substances.

## **What Are Your Resources?**

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It's one thing for you or a loved one to accept that you are struggling with an addictive problem and that there will be a withdrawal period. It's quite another thing entirely to be able to use the resources at your disposal to get into a therapy group or to enroll in an in-patient or outpatient rehab program. Many patients who are struggling with substance abuse have legitimate concerns about how they will keep their job and who will take care of their kids or another dependent relative while they are seeking help. They may also not have any insurance or employee assistance program that will help to cover the costs of rehab. They see the entire withdrawal process and subsequent rehabilitation as a temporary solution at best. They are understandably afraid that, as soon as things get tough, they will relapse right back into substance abuse or other problem behaviors. Just because you get help and get off the substance which has you addicted doesn't mean that you will know how to function

without it, such as when you attempt to return to work after rehab, and you have to manage your family and the normal stresses of daily life. You aren't alone. Find the resources that are locally available to you or a loved one and plan a course of action that will help you win the lifelong battle with substance abuse. With the right support system in place, you could make a success of yourself and construct a new life after rehab. If you have a loved one who is ready to face his or her addiction, you could also serve as a critical support system for their rehab process. Start with information about addiction because knowledge is power!