Alcohol Withdrawal

Anytime drug use is interfering with normal living activities it has become abuse. This includes problems with family and friends. Psychological dependence has developed when your mind tells you that the drug is needed. This is usually followed by physical dependence when a continuing increase of drugs are required to get the same feeling or "high". This is known as **addiction** or **chemical dependency**. A person's risk is much higher if there is a history of chemical dependency in the family.

Mild Withdrawal Following Stopping Alcohol, When Addiction or Chemical Dependency Has Developed
When a person has developed tolerance to alcohol, any sudden stopping of alcohol can cause uncomfortable physical *symptoms* (problems). Most of the time these are mild and consist of tremors in the hands and increases in heart rate, breathing, and temperature. Sometimes these symptoms are associated with anxiety, panic attacks, and bad dreams. There may also be stomach upset. Normal sleep patterns are often interrupted with periods of insomnia (inability to sleep). This may last for 6 months. Because of this discomfort, many people choose to continue drinking to get rid of this discomfort and to **try to feel normal**.

Severe Withdrawal with Decreased or No Alcohol Intake, When Addiction or Chemical Dependency Has Developed
About five percent of alcoholics will develop signs of severe withdrawal when they stop using alcohol. One sign of this is development of generalized seizures (*convulsions*). Other signs of this are severe agitation and confusion. This may be associated with *delusions and hallucinations* (believing in things which are not real or seeing things which are not really there). Vitamin deficiencies are usually present if alcohol intake has been long term. Treatment for this most often requires hospitalization and close observation.

Addiction can only be helped by stopping use of all chemicals. **This is hard but may save your life.** With continual alcohol use possible outcomes are usually loss of self respect and esteem, violence, and death. It can eventually lead to prison if the use of alcohol has caused the death of another.

Addiction cannot be cured but it can be stopped. This often requires outside help and the care of professionals. Treatment centers are listed in the yellow pages under Cocaine, Narcotics, and Alcoholics anonymous. Most hospitals and clinics can refer you to a specialized care center.

It is not necessary for you to go through the uncomfortable symptoms of withdrawal. Your caregiver can provide you with medications that will help you through this difficult period. Try to avoid situations, friends, or drugs that made it possible for you to keep using alcohol in the past. **Learn how to say no!**

It takes a long period of time to overcome addictions to all drugs, including alcohol. There may be many times when you feel as though you want a drink. All this amounts to is a want. After getting rid of the physical addiction and withdrawal, you will have a lessening of the craving which tells you that you need alcohol to feel normal. Call your caregiver if more support is needed. Learn who to talk to in your family and among your friends so that during these periods you can receive outside help. AA (Alcoholics Anonymous) has helped many people over the years. To get further help, contact AA or call your caregiver, counselor or minister. AL-ANON and ALA-TEEN are support groups for friends and family members of an alcoholic. The people who love and care for an alcoholic often need help, too. For information about these organizations, check your phone directory or call a local alcoholism treatment center.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You have a seizure.
- You develop a high fever.
- You experience uncontrolled vomiting or you vomit up blood. This may be bright red or look like black

coffee grounds.

- You have blood in the stool. This may be bright red or appear as a black tarry, foul smelling stool.
- You become light headed or faint. DO NOT DRIVE IF YOU FEEL THIS WAY. Have someone else drive you or call 911 for help.
- You become more agitated or confused.
- You develop uncontrolled anxiety.
- You begin to have *hallucinations* (see things that are not really there).

Your caregiver has determined that you completely understand your medical condition, and that your mental state is back to normal. You understand that you have been treated for alcohol withdrawal, have agreed not to drink any alcohol for a minimum of 1 day, will not operate a car or other machinery for 24 hours, and have had an opportunity to ask any questions about your condition.

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