

# Hospital to Home Detoxification - Information for Carers

An information guide



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## Alcohol Withdrawal

This leaflet is for relatives or friends of patients, who have been admitted to hospital and have a alcohol dependency, but wish to complete an alcohol detoxification.

During admission to hospital, your relative or friend will have been assessed in regards to their alcohol use and signs/symptoms of alcohol withdrawals.

Alcohol withdrawal symptoms typically develop within 6-8 hours after the last alcoholic drink, as the effects of alcohol wears off. Symptoms may vary in severity, but commonly peak at 10-30 hours, usually subsiding by 40-50 hours. However, the craving for alcohol may last longer.

Alcohol withdrawal symptoms typically include feeling sick, trembling, sweating, headache, craving for alcohol and feeling unwell. The patient may feel anxious, agitated, and nervous and may have sleeping difficulties. More severe symptoms may include seizures, seeing or hearing things that others do not and delirium tremens (DT's).

The effects of alcohol withdrawal differ for each individual and cannot be predicted. Some people may not experience anything, whilst others may experience different symptoms at different severities.

## **Detoxification**

Detoxification involves taking a short course of medication to help prevent withdrawal symptoms when a person stops, or dramatically reduces, their drinking.

Your relative or friend has been commenced on medication to stop alcohol withdrawals and is being regularly reviewed to check its effectiveness.

The medicated detoxification process can last up to seven days, but quite often, patients are medically fit for discharge before their detoxification is complete.

You relative or friend has been deemed medically fit for discharge. They have been assessed by the Alcohol Liaison Service as appropriate for the continuation of their alcohol detoxification at home. We have been assured the home environment is safe and the patient has adequate support.

On the day of discharge, your relative or friend will have received a medication regime, a visit plan and a prescription. They will have also signed a patient contract agreeing to daily visits, daily blood pressure, pulse and Alco meter readings. They have agreed not to consume any further alcohol. Refusal to adhere to any of these criteria will result in the immediate discontinuation of the detoxification.

On the day of discharge or the following day, your relative or friend will be visited by the Detox Nurse and this will continue daily until the medication is completed. Some further follow up appointments may occur depending upon identified need.

## How Can I Help?

- Make sure any alcohol has been removed from the home environment. Check any places where it could have been hidden.
- Do not drink alcohol in front of your relative or friend and respect that talking about alcohol could be a trigger to them craving a drink.
- Discuss with your relative or friend how they will manage cravings for alcohol. Have a list of things that they enjoy doing, so you can use these as distractions from cravings.
- Be positive and remind them of their reasons for wanting to be alcohol-free when they are struggling. Remind them that cravings are temporary and will pass.
- The medication used for detoxification can make some people a little drowsy and unsteady on their feet. It is essential for someone to be supporting the patient whilst they take the medication. This may involve food shopping for the patient, generally checking that they are safe around the house and making sure they take their medications as prescribed.
- Encourage your relative or friend to eat. Their diet might have decreased whilst drinking alcohol, but it is important to build it up again. Suggest small meals, regularly until their dietary intake has improved. Maybe buy some of their favourite foods for them.
- Your relative or friend may struggle initially with their sleep. Try to keep them awake during the day, so they are more likely to sleep at night. You might want to go for a short walk, listen to music or take them out in the car. Encourage them to utilise the sleep hygiene tips that they have been given in their Hospital to Home Detoxification Patient Information Leaflet.
- Drinking alcohol can often be dehydrating, encourage your relative or friend to drink at least a litre of fluids a day. Ask

them what drinks they would prefer to substitute the alcohol with and make sure you have stocked up with them.

- Sweets can sometimes help with the cravings for alcohol, if your relative is not diabetic. During their detoxification, sometimes the cravings are for the sugar that they aren't now receiving in the alcohol. This can also be used as a distraction technique.
- Although your relative or friend has been assessed as safe to go home, there is the potential, that an adverse alcohol withdrawal may occur. If your relative begins twitching or shaking, or starts hearing or seeing things that aren't there, you must immediately phone 999 for an ambulance. Inform the Detox Nurse as soon as possible.
- It is extremely dangerous to drink alcohol alongside the prescribed medication as it can cause serious breathing difficulties. This could lead to death. You must inform the Detox Nurse immediately if you suspect your relative or friend is drinking alcohol.
- Post detoxification, your relative or friend may need to access some of the abstinence services so encourage attendance and help support them to any meetings you can.
- There is also support available for carers, which you can access if you should require. Ask the Detox Nurse for further information if you are interested and they can advise you of the referral process.
- Recognise that caring for someone going through detoxification and recovery can take a lot of commitment and energy. Therefore, it's just as important to take care of yourself, so that you are more able to effectively support your relative or friend.

**If you require any further advice or support, please do not hesitate to contact the**

**Alcohol Liaison Service on 01706 517 102**

Please note that the Alcohol Liaison Service is available Monday to Friday between 9am – 5pm (excluding Bank Holidays)

## Notes

**If English is not your first language and you need help, please contact the Interpretation and Translation Service**

Jeśli angielski nie jest twoim pierwszym językiem i potrzebujesz pomocy, skontaktuj się z działem tłumaczeń ustnych i pisemnych

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Dacă engleza nu este prima ta limbă și ai nevoie de ajutor, te rugăm să contactezi Serviciul de interpretare și traducere

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**For general enquiries please contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on 0161 604 5897**

**For enquiries regarding clinic appointments, clinical care and treatment please contact 0161 624 0420 and the Switchboard Operator will put you through to the correct department / service**

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