

Alcohol-Related Brain Injury (ARBI)

An information guide



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Introduction

Alcohol-Related Brain Injury (ARBI) and Alcohol-Related Brain Damage (ARBD) are umbrella terms used to describe damage that can occur in people that drink at heavy levels over a prolonged period of time.

Alcohol can disrupt communication between brain cells, destroy brain cells, lead to structural changes in the brain and even cause shrinkage of the brain.

Wernicke's Encephalopathy and Korsakoff Syndrome are included under these umbrella terms. Signs and Symptoms depend on the individual's brain, where the damage has occurred in the brain, the amount of damage that has occurred and whether the damage is reversible or not.

People with Wernicke's or Korsakoff don't always notice their symptoms, but friends and family can notice symptoms that include:

- Confusion.
- Problems with Short Term Memory, including confabulation.
- Problems with Cognition or Cognitive Impairment.
- Increased Risk of Falls (due to impairment of balance & coordination).
- Problems with motivation
- Problems with assessing risk and problem solving.
- Personality changes.

Wernicke's Encephalopathy

The three main symptoms of Wernicke's Encephalopathy are:

- Confusion (presenting in over 80% of cases).
- An unsteady gait (unsteady on your feet) .
- In extreme cases, abnormal eye movements.

Wernicke's is completely reversible with the right treatment.

Treatment during a hospital stay would be through a drip containing Pabrinex (a yellow liquid containing high dose vitamins needed to improve brain function) into the patient's vein.

In the community treatment would be through oral Thiamine tablets. See more about Thiamine below.

Korsakoff Syndrome

This is a form of dementia, usually caused by long term, heavy drinking. Korsakoff Syndrome is non-reversible.

It is often poorly diagnosed as symptoms are similar to that of other forms of dementia.

The Importance of Thiamine (Vitamin B1)

Thiamine (Vitamin B1) is used to convert carbohydrates into glucose (energy); the brain requires a certain amount of glucose to function normally.

People that drink above the maximum recommended levels of alcohol use, particularly heavy drinkers, often become deficient in thiamine because:

- **They don't consume enough Thiamine due to poor diet and/or replacing meals with alcohol.**
- **Thiamine is poorly absorbed in the small intestine.**
- **Only a small amount of Thiamine is stored in the liver. If the liver is impaired it can result in even less Thiamine being stored and available for use in the body.**

People that drink alcohol regularly can easily become deficient in thiamine. For this reason, they should always be prescribed Thiamine and are strongly encouraged to take it as prescribed.

The Good News

The good news is that Alcohol-Related Brain Injury is often reversible through abstinence from alcohol.

It takes approximately 3 months of abstinence from alcohol for the brain to recover (Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2014).

Help & Support

For more information about alcohol-related brain injury, you can contact your local Hospital Alcohol Care Team on:

- Salford Royal Foundation Trust Alcohol Service on: **0161 206 0528**
- Royal Oldham Hospital Alcohol Service on: **0161 656 1933**
- Rochdale Infirmary Alcohol Service on: **01706 517 102**
- Fairfield General Hospital Alcohol Service on: **0161 716 1155**
- NCA Lead Nurse for Alcohol Services on: **07837 534073**

Or you can contact your community drug and alcohol treatment service:

- Salford ACHIEVE: **0161 358 1530**
- Rochdale & Oldham Active Recovery: **0300 555 0345**
- CGL (Change Grow Live) Manchester: **0161 214 0770**
- Bury ACHIEVE: **0161 271 0020**

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 advice on stopping smoking contact the Specialist Stop Smoking Service on 01706 517 522

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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