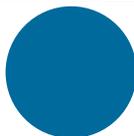
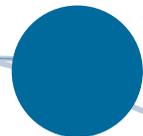




# Medically assisted withdrawal from alcohol at home: A guide for you and your carer

Patient information leaflet



## What is medically assisted withdrawal from alcohol, and what is involved?

For some people after a period of heavy sustained drinking, a time of detoxification or drying out is needed. This requires you to stop drinking altogether. For some people, especially if they have developed a dependency upon alcohol this can be difficult and unsafe without help. Medically assisted withdrawal is the term used to describe the process of supporting you through the detox safely with the use of medication.

Most people who need detoxification find that they can do this at home as long as they have the support of a caring relative or friend and with the support and supervision of a community nurse and their GP.

Before you start, your ARCH community nurse will arrange to assess you (normally at home) to see whether a home detoxification is the best choice of treatment for you. During this assessment we will ask you about your patterns of drinking and any previous attempts to stop. This appointment will also provide you with an opportunity to ask us what is involved, so you may wish for a supportive friend or relative to be present.

If a medically assisted withdrawal is indicated we will liaise with your GP on your behalf to ask them to prescribe medication to support you through the detox safely. Sedative medication is usually prescribed for approximately 7-10 days in reducing dosages. Throughout the detoxification your ARCH nurse will visit you regularly to monitor any symptoms of withdrawal and response to the medication.

**Your nurse will usually be contactable from Monday to Friday during office hours 9-5 by calling the number overleaf. If you or your carer have any concerns about your symptoms or progress outside of these hours please contact your GP for advice or in an emergency call 999.**

# Looking after yourself during the detoxification

As you withdraw from alcohol, sometimes the following symptoms can occur as your body readjusts:

- shaking and sweating
- unsteadiness
- nausea and vomiting
- anxiety and irritability
- restlessness and sleep disturbance
- sensitivity to light and sound.

Very rarely people can experience hallucinations and/or withdrawal fits. The medication prescribed reduces the risk of this occurring. More information about seizures is provided overleaf, however your nurse will be happy to answer any questions you or your carer may have. Most of the withdrawal symptoms should start to settle after 48 hours.

**Medication helps to control the above symptoms to keep you safe and comfortable. However it can also make you feel drowsy. You may also feel quite shaky especially during the first day or two.**

**It's important that you follow the following safety information during the detox period. Extra care needs to be taken when:**

- when smoking especially in bed
- whilst bathing or showering
- cooking or pouring hot liquids.

**Do not drive, cycle or operate machinery whilst taking the medication.**

# Looking after yourself during the detoxification

You can help your body by :

- Drinking plenty of clear fluids to avoid dehydration due to excess sweating. Try and avoid fruit juices as these can be irritating to your stomach.
- You may find that your appetite takes a day or two to start returning. This is quite normal. Try to eat small amounts regularly. Foods which are high in protein, vitamins and carbohydrates such as fish, dairy products, pasta, rice, fruit and nuts are all good to build up your strength. **Don't forget to take any vitamins prescribed regularly as they will also help your body recover.**
- As much as possible, avoid unnecessary stress and noise whilst you are withdrawing.
- Avoid sleeping in the day although rest as much as you can.
- Avoid drinking too much tea, coffee and caffeinated drinks as this may increase your anxiety and restlessness and interfere with your ability to sleep at night.

# Withdrawal seizures

Sometimes withdrawal seizures (or fits) can occur. The riskiest time is during the first 48 hours of the detox. In the unlikely event of this happening, there are a few simple rules to follow.

When a person is having a fit they will begin to shake and twitch (observing this can be frightening). The person may appear to stop breathing and their hands and face may start to turn blue.

- Try not to panic.
- Do not try and restrict the person but remove any potential obstacles nearby that could harm the person whilst they are fitting.
- Do not put or try and force any thing into their mouth.
- Try and time the fit.
- After the fit has stopped the person may appear drowsy and confused.
- Ensure that they are able to breathe properly by placing them in the recovery position (on their side with head tilted).
- Calmly offer reassurance and explain what has happened.
- Inform detox nurse at earliest opportunity.

## When to dial 999

**Usually when a person has an withdrawal seizure there is no need to call an ambulance. However, you should always dial 999 for an ambulance if any of the following apply:**

- They have injured themselves badly.
- They have trouble breathing after the seizure has stopped.
- One seizure immediately follows another with no recovery in between.
- The seizure lasts for more than five minutes.

# Your ongoing recovery

Detoxification is only the first step in achieving recovery. Evidence tells us that having ongoing support improves your chances of remaining abstinent from alcohol. Your ARCH nurse will discuss with you options available across the city. Help is available with:

- access to individual support as well as relapse prevention and recovery focussed meetings
- access to employment and training support
- Aspire Recovery Coaching or peer mentoring to help you make links with others in recovery and accessing support in your local community
- access to medications to reduce the risk of relapse such as Acamprasate.

During your detoxification your nurse will discuss with you your plans for continuing support. Each ARCH has a range of meetings and activities that you may wish to access including recovery meetings, motivation meetings, acupuncture and access into SMART recovery meetings and other community focused support.

## Useful contacts

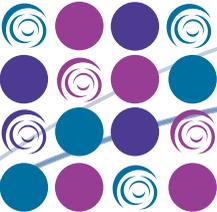
- **Alcohol Concern:** Information and advice for people whose lives are affected by alcohol. Tel: 0800 917 8282. Website: [www.alcoholconcern.org.uk](http://www.alcoholconcern.org.uk)
- **Alcoholics Anonymous:** Is an international mutual aid movement. Tel. 0845 769 7555 for details of local meetings. Website: [www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk](http://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk)
- **Al-Anon Family Groups:** Provide treatment support for family members dealing with alcoholism. Tel: 0207 403 0888 (available 10am to 10pm) Website: [www.al-anonuk.org.uk](http://www.al-anonuk.org.uk)
- **Aquarius:** Offer pre and post detox support to help you in your ongoing recovery. They provide individual and group support and can help you access other services such as housing or debt management advice. They also have a family and carer support service. Tel. 0121 414 0888.
- **SMART:** Stands for Self Management and Recovery Training. They teach a set a tools that can be used with great effect to support a person's recovery and address some of the thoughts and feelings that often lie behind addictive behaviours. To find out where your locals SMART group meets call: 0796 623 7613. Website: [smartrecovery.org.uk](http://smartrecovery.org.uk)
- **Irish In Birmingham:** Offer support to the Irish community across the city including support with alcohol problems. Tel 0121 604 6111.
- **A Team:** Based in GP surgeries offering support for those wishing to cut down their drinking. Tel 0121 455 8175.

# ARCH contacts

**My ARCH nurse:** .....

**My ARCH recovery worker:** .....

**My local ARCH contact details:** .....



Brought to you by



**Birmingham and Solihull**   
Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust