

FACTSHEET SEVEN

ALCOHOL WITHDRAWAL SYMPTOMS

Alcohol withdrawal symptoms can occur up to 72 hours after stopping drinking. It is the reduction in the level of alcohol in the bloodstream that causes withdrawal symptoms.

The most frequently seen withdrawal symptoms are tremors, sweats, flushing of the skin, nausea, vomiting, restlessness, insomnia, dehydration, agitated behaviour, anxiety.

Withdrawal fits

Some people can go into fit up to three days after stopping drinking, although they will have been drinking at very high levels indeed. Such fits are usually the type described as grand mal. Periods of fits can last for up to five days. Medical treatment is usually initiated should someone go into fit following stopping drinking.

Delirium Tremens (the DTs)

This is often talked about, but is fortunately rarely seen. It can last for up to nine or ten days after the last drink, usually peaking after about seven days. As with all withdrawal symptoms, the severity decreases as time progresses.

As well as the withdrawal symptoms indicated above, the following are indicative of delirium tremens: intense agitation, restlessness, hyperventilation, tachycardia, hyper/hypotension, sweating profusely and fever, hallucinations (visual and auditory), disorientation, paranoia. Coma and death occasionally occur when someone is suffering from DTs.

Alcoholic Hallucinations

This is not to be confused with delirium tremens. Visual, auditory and tactile (touch) hallucinations of a severe nature are experienced. Anxiety and agitation is extreme.

If you are caring for someone who is withdrawing from alcohol, you may find it helpful to speak to one of our Advice staff – please call, and select option 1.