

Withdrawal from Alcohol

You may experience SOME of the listed symptoms of withdrawal. Remember that ALL THESE SYMPTOMS ARE TEMPORARY. If any persist or worsen, have them checked by your doctor in case they are related to another problem.

See a more detailed explanation of some of the symptoms on page 3.

ACUTE WITHDRAWAL (FIRST STAGE): MILD TO MODERATE

The symptoms can start within 6 to 36 hours after your last drink and most of them will last for a few hours up to a few days. The symptoms are listed by frequency, with the first ones occurring more often.

Physical Symptoms

- fast heartbeat, palpitations
- headache
- sweating, flushing of your face
- muscle trembling, muscle spasms, hand and body tremors
- insomnia, restlessness
- numbness, tingling or burning sensations in your arms or legs
- nausea, vomiting
- ringing in your ears, dry mouth
- itching

Psychological Symptoms

- anxiety
- paranoia

ACUTE WITHDRAWAL (FIRST STAGE): SEVERE

The symptoms start within five to ten hours after your last drink, get worse over the next two to three days, and last up to seven to ten days.

If the new severe symptoms occur or the ones that were mild to moderate become severe, you should call/see your doctor. Other people may notice some of these symptoms rather than you; if someone you know says you are acting strangely or saying things that don't make sense, it means you may have some of these symptoms.

Physical Symptoms

- seizures (convulsions)
- severe pain in stomach
- chest infections
- poor balance when walking
- fast heart beat
- sweating, flushing of your face
- muscle trembling, muscle spasms
- insomnia, restlessness
- nausea, vomiting

Psychological Symptoms

- hallucinations: These may occur without the other severe symptoms. When they occur they start 12 to 24 hours after your last drink and can last 24 to 28 hours.
- paranoia worsening
- very confused

POST ACUTE WITHDRAWAL (SECOND STAGE)

Physical Symptoms

The physical symptoms can last up to six months. They gradually decrease during the six months.

- insomnia, restlessness
- headache
- tiredness, weakness
- muscle trembling
- sexual problems, e.g. impotence

Psychological Symptoms

Some of the psychological symptoms are ongoing symptoms related to your use of alcohol. They will gradually decrease over 3 to 12 months.

- anxiety
- depression, mood swings
- irritability
- poor concentration
- poor memory
- impulsiveness
- difficulty in thinking clearly, making plans or decisions

DESCRIPTION OF SYMPTOMS (alphabetical order)

Anxiety: feeling that an unreal or imagined danger is about to happen, feelings of powerlessness accompanied by increased heart rate, increased breathing, sweating, trembling, weakness. Both excess caffeine and excess sugar can increase anxiety and insomnia.

Hallucinations: seeing, hearing, smelling or feeling things that are not real.

Insomnia: any form of disturbed sleep, especially early morning waking. It may include nightmares. Dreams about you or others drinking are common in both first and second stages of withdrawal. These dreams can recur intermittently during abstinence in response to a trigger.

Itching: can be anywhere on your body. It happens without a rash.

Mood Swings: feeling very happy and then very sad. The swings are often related to low and high blood sugar and sugar cravings. This cause of the mood swings can be avoided by eating a regular balanced diet with minimal sugar.

Numbness, Tingling and Burning Sensations: the feeling you get when your hand falls asleep or you wake up with it asleep from lying on one arm too long. These sensations can occur anywhere on your body.

Paranoia: thoughts or feelings of being disliked (or if intense, hated) by other people; that they are thinking or saying bad things about you; that you are about to be harmed by other people. When the paranoia worsens, you fully believe in the threat of harm and act as if you are about to be harmed.

Seizures: Alcohol withdrawal seizures can happen up to 96 hours (usually in the first 48 hours) after your last drink. They can happen without the other symptoms of severe withdrawal. If they happen with the other symptoms of severe withdrawal, they usually happen before the other symptoms of severe withdrawal.

Tiredness, weakness: may be related partly to low blood sugar. The low blood sugar causes a craving for sugar and sweet foods. The tiredness tends to cause a craving for caffeine.