



Patient & Family Guide

2022

Outpatient Withdrawal Management



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Outpatient Withdrawal Management

Outpatient Withdrawal Management is a medical treatment for people who:

- › have been assessed (checked) as not likely to get seriously sick from withdrawal.
- › can safely take part in medication-assisted withdrawal in a community setting with daily support from the Outpatient Withdrawal Management team.

This guide has helpful information for you and/or your support person(s) about the Outpatient Withdrawal Management Service and what you can expect during the withdrawal process. If you or your support person(s) have any questions or concerns at any time, please call your local Outpatient Withdrawal Management team.

Phone: _____

What is withdrawal?

- If you are dependent on a substance, you get used to having that substance in your body. If you take less of it or stop using it all of a sudden, this can cause physical and mental symptoms. This is called **withdrawal**.

- The types of symptoms you have and how bad you feel them may depend on:
 - › what substance(s) you have been using.
 - › how long you have been using the substance(s).
 - › how much you have been using.
 - › your health.
 - › your medical history.
- Because of changes in your brain and body (like sweating, temperature changes, stomach upset, restlessness, anxiety) using medication and other supports may help you withdraw safely from substances.
- Withdrawal can be very uncomfortable and is sometimes a risk to your safety (for example, some people can have **seizures [convulsions], and/or die**).
- Outpatient Withdrawal Management is for people who are expected to have withdrawal symptoms, but their symptoms are not serious enough for them to be admitted to a hospital overnight.

What are the benefits of taking part in Outpatient Withdrawal Management?

- You will have access to safe and effective medication-assisted withdrawal.

- During the day, the team will support you to manage your withdrawal treatment. At night, you can go home with your support person(s).
- You will learn more about substance use and addiction treatment.

What are the risks of taking part in Outpatient Withdrawal Management?

- You may be given medication(s) as part of your treatment. All medications have risks, including some serious side effects. The nurse practitioner or doctor at Outpatient Withdrawal Management will go over these risks and side effects with you.
- Getting seriously sick can happen without warning. You may even have to be admitted to the hospital.

Some rare, serious withdrawal symptoms are signs of medical emergencies that can lead to death. If you have these symptoms, you will need to be seen by a doctor right away. If you have any of the following symptoms, call 911 right away:

- › **Confused thinking and actions (not sure where you are or what you are doing)**
- › **Seeing, hearing, or feeling things that are not there**
- › **Seizures (convulsions)**
- › **Signs of dehydration (not having enough fluids), like dark urine (pee) or not urinating (peeing) at all**
- › **Weakness or dizziness**
- › **Blacking out or fainting**
- › **Severe (very bad) tremors and/or shaking so bad that you cannot hold a cup of liquid in your hand without spilling it**
- › **High fever (temperature above 38⁰ C/100.4⁰ F)**

How long will the withdrawal process take?

- Most people need to come to the Outpatient Withdrawal Management Service for at least a couple of days.
- Most withdrawal symptoms are weaker after 3 days. You may still have some symptoms (like anxiety, trouble sleeping, tremors and/or shaking) that can last for weeks to months.
- It is normal to still crave the substance. After-care support (like educational groups, self-help meetings like Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) or Narcotics Anonymous (NA), and ongoing counselling) can help you manage your cravings.

What can I do to manage my withdrawal symptoms overnight?

- The Outpatient Withdrawal Management team may give you medication(s) to take home with you. Follow the directions that come with this medication.
- Talk to your pharmacist if you have any questions or concerns about any medication.
- Try to keep your space quiet and peaceful (if that helps you).
- If you have trouble sleeping, it can still help to lay down and rest.

- Try to eat regularly – even a small amount can help. Try not to eat spicy, hard to digest, or rich foods as they may upset your stomach.
- Try to drink lots of water – take small sips often.
- Cut down on caffeine (like coffee, tea). Caffeine can cause sleep problems and make you more anxious.
- Cut down on sports drinks (like Gatorade™) as they may upset your stomach, and energy drinks (like Red Bull™) as they often have a lot of sugar and caffeine.
- To calm and comfort yourself, and take your mind off of your cravings, remember the 5 Ds:
 - › **Do** an activity (watch a video, play cards, or listen to music).
 - › **Delay** (put off) making decisions for an hour.
 - › **Drink** lots of water.
 - › **Discuss** (talk about) your reasons for wanting to stop using a substance with your support person(s).
 - › **Do** gentle exercises (like walking, stretching, or yoga).

- You can take over-the-counter medications, as directed on the package, to help with some withdrawal symptoms, like:
 - › Diarrhea (loose, watery stool [poop])
 - › Headaches
 - › Itchy skin
 - › Muscle aches
 - › Upset stomach

Talk to the Outpatient Withdrawal Management team about all other medications you take, including over-the-counter medication(s).

For your safety, please tell the Outpatient Withdrawal Management team if you use a substance at any time during your treatment.

We are here to help you and keep you safe.

Are there things to avoid during treatment?

- While you are taking withdrawal medication(s), ask your primary health care provider (family doctor or nurse practitioner), or pharmacist if it is safe for you to:
 - › Drive a vehicle (like a car, ATV, boat) or use a heavy machine (like a lawn mower, tractor, forklift)
 - › Sign important or legal documents (like a loan, mortgage, will)

- › Go to school or do work where you have to be alert (like climbing a ladder or using a machine)
- › Drink alcohol or use other substances

What will happen after the withdrawal process?

- Near the end of the withdrawal process, the Outpatient Withdrawal Management team will work with you to make a plan for your next steps (like ongoing counselling, going to self-help meetings like AA or NA, setting goals). Ongoing care and support can improve your chance of reaching your goals.
- The nurse practitioner or doctor at Outpatient Withdrawal Management will let you know when you can stop taking medication(s). They will answer any questions you may have.

What are the benefits of having a support person(s)?

A support person is someone who agrees to support you through the withdrawal process. We encourage you to have someone who can support you until you return to Outpatient Withdrawal Management for your next appointment or until you are done your withdrawal.

How can my support person help?

Your support person can:

- Help arrange a drive to the clinic and home
- Help you take medication(s) as directed
- Help you manage any pain or discomfort you may have
- Help you to work through cravings and remind you what may help (see the 5 D's on page 6)
- Be there to listen and talk with you

Who can I call for support?

- For questions about your Outpatient Withdrawal Management care plan, call your local team.
- **For mental health and addictions crisis support, call the Provincial Mental Health and Addictions Crisis Line (24 hours a day, 7 days a week):**
 - › **Phone (toll-free): 1-888-429-8167**
 - › **If it is an emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest Emergency Department right away.**

How can I give feedback?

We welcome your feedback. When you tell us about your experience, good or bad, it helps us improve the care and service we provide.

Ways to provide feedback:

- Share directly with the Outpatient Withdrawal Management team or manager.
- Complete a client experience survey or feedback form at the Outpatient Withdrawal Management Clinic.
- Call our Patient Relations Team:
 - › Phone (toll-free): 1-844-884-4177

For more information, visit:

- › www.nshealth.ca/contact-us/patient-feedback

What are your questions?

Please ask. We are here to help you.

Notes:

Looking for more health information?

Find this pamphlet and all our patient resources here: <https://library.nshealth.ca/PatientEducation>

Contact your local public library for books, videos, magazines, and other resources.

For more information, go to <http://library.novascotia.ca>

Connect with a registered nurse in Nova Scotia any time: call 811 or visit <https://811.novascotia.ca>

Learn about other programs and services in your community: call 211 or visit <http://ns.211.ca>

Nova Scotia Health promotes a smoke-free, vape-free, and scent-free environment.

Please do not use perfumed products. Thank you!

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The information in this pamphlet is to be updated every 3 years or as needed.

