



Patient & Family Guide
2020

Home-based Withdrawal Management Pilot



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Home-based Withdrawal Management Pilot

Welcome! You are enrolled in the Mental Health and Addictions Program (MHAP) Home-based Withdrawal Management Pilot. This is a key step in your recovery. We are here to help you.

The pilot is for people who:

- › are at low risk of severe (very bad) or complicated withdrawal and
- › may benefit from medication-assisted alcohol withdrawal in a home or community setting.

Please read this guide carefully. It has helpful information for you and your support person(s). If you or your support person(s) have any questions or concerns at any time, please contact the Withdrawal Management Unit at 902-425-1099 to talk with a nurse.

What is addiction?

- Addiction (also known as substance use disorder) is a chronic (ongoing) health condition. Using a substance (such as alcohol) repeatedly over time can lead to changes in the brain. This may make it hard for someone with addiction to resist strong urges to use the substance, even when it is harmful. Addiction can be managed like other chronic diseases (such as diabetes or heart disease).
- Sometimes a person needs medical or other supports to withdraw safely from substance use because of the changes in their brain and body.

What is alcohol withdrawal?

- Alcohol is a depressant. This means that it slows down your central nervous system (brain and spinal cord).
- When you drink alcohol every day for several weeks or longer, your central nervous system speeds up to work against the effects of the alcohol. This is called tolerance.
- Over time, your body and brain become dependent on alcohol. This means you need more alcohol to get the same effect.

- If you are dependent on alcohol and stop drinking suddenly, your brain and body need to adjust. Your central nervous system will take several days to slow down to normal. During this time, you may have acute alcohol withdrawal.
- Symptoms of acute withdrawal start about 12 hours after your last drink. Symptoms often start to get better after 3 days of not drinking alcohol, but may last up to 7 days.
- The types of symptoms you experience and how bad you feel them may depend on:
 - › how much alcohol you have been drinking.
 - › how long you have been drinking.
 - › your overall health.
 - › your medical history.
- Withdrawal can be very uncomfortable and is sometimes a risk to your overall health. Rarely, alcohol withdrawal may lead to serious illnesses, such as:
 - › Delirium (confused thinking and actions)
 - › Hallucinations (seeing, hearing, or feeling things that are not there)
 - › Seizures (convulsions)
 - › Severe dehydration (not having enough fluids)
 - › Heart problems
 - › Death

- The home withdrawal process is meant for people who are not likely to become seriously ill from withdrawal.

What are the symptoms of alcohol withdrawal?

- If your withdrawal symptoms cause you discomfort, it is important to take the medication prescribed by your doctor (diazepam [Valium®]) to feel better.
- Common withdrawal symptoms may include:
 - › Anxiety
 - › Feeling irritable or agitated
 - › Restlessness
 - › Sleep problems
 - › Mild headache
 - › Mild nausea (feeling sick to your stomach), stomach cramping, or upset stomach
 - › Mild tremors (shakes)
 - › Mild muscle aches or cramping
 - › Itchy skin or tingling (“pins and needles”)

- Less common withdrawal symptoms may include:
 - › The same symptoms as above, but worse
 - › Panic attacks
 - › Feeling very depressed
 - › Mood swings
 - › Vomiting (throwing up)
 - › Bad sweats and/or chills
 - › Feeling like your heart is racing

It is important to call the Withdrawal Management Unit for advice if you have any of these less common symptoms.

Rare, serious withdrawal symptoms that need immediate medical attention include:

- › Hallucinations
- › Confusion or not being aware of where you are (Your support person may notice this before you do.)
- › Delusions (having strange ideas or paranoia [mistrust] that is not real. Your support person may notice this before you do.)
- › Blacking out or fainting
- › Fever over 38° C/100.4° F
- › Seizures

These symptoms are a medical emergency. Call 911 right away or go to the nearest Emergency Department. Then call the Withdrawal Management Unit.

What medications can help me manage my withdrawal symptoms?

- Diazepam (Valium®) is a medication that can be used to treat alcohol withdrawal symptoms until withdrawal is complete.
- **It is important to read the information from the pharmacy when you get your medication.**
- You will receive the medication in 5 mg tablets. Store the medication in a secure place that only you or your support person can access. It is best if your support person gives you the medication.
- Take the medication as directed. You do not need to take it on a schedule, only as needed.
- The tablets can be taken with or without food.
- Swallow the tablets whole. **Do not let the tablets dissolve in your mouth. Do not chew or crush the medication** or take it in any way other than as directed.
- For the first 24 hours, you can take 1 to 2 tablets every 4 hours, as needed. **DO NOT take more than 10 mg (2 tablets) every 4 hours. DO NOT take more than 40 mg (8 tablets) total in the first 24 hours (1 day).**
- This medication can make you feel tired or a little dizzy. If you or your support person notice you are unusually sleepy, unsteady on your feet, or confused after taking this medication, contact the Withdrawal Management Unit before taking another dose.

- **Do not drive, operate heavy or dangerous machinery, or make important decisions while you are taking this medication** and going through withdrawal.
- Contact the Withdrawal Management Unit if you are not feeling well and it is not yet time to take another dose.
- Contact the Withdrawal Management Unit as soon as possible if you lose or accidentally throw out the medication during the withdrawal process. The missed doses may or may not be replaced.
- This medication will not be prescribed after the withdrawal process is complete. Please return any leftover medication to the pharmacy for safe disposal.

Do not take this medication with alcohol. Stop taking this medication if you use any alcohol at all during the withdrawal process. If this happens, contact the Withdrawal Management Unit as soon as possible for further advice.

What support will I have at home during the withdrawal process?

- Shortly after you arrive home from your in-person assessment at the Withdrawal Management Unit, a nurse from the unit will call to help you get ready for the withdrawal process. **You and your support person must be available by phone at all times. If anything changes and you will not be available by phone, please contact the Withdrawal Management Unit as soon as possible.**
- Medication will be ordered to your pharmacy for you to pick up or have delivered.
- Once the withdrawal process starts, the nurses will check in with you by phone or video at least every 12 hours until the process is complete.

What else can I do to help myself through withdrawal?

- Keep your home as quiet and peaceful as possible. Even if you have trouble sleeping, resting can help.
- Try to eat regularly. Even a small amount of food can help. Try to avoid spicy, hard to digest, and rich foods.
- Keep up your fluid intake.
 - › Drink plenty of water, taking small sips at a time.
 - › If you are a regular coffee or tea drinker, try to limit these drinks, as extra caffeine can disrupt your sleep and make you feel more anxious.
 - › Electrolyte replacement drinks (like sports drinks) may be used in moderation, but may upset your stomach.
 - › Most “energy drinks” contain a lot of sugar and caffeine. They should not be a main source of fluid intake.

- Over-the-counter medications may help with some withdrawal symptoms. **These medications must be used as directed on the package.** They include:
 - › Advil® (ibuprofen) or Tylenol® (acetaminophen) for headaches and muscle aches
 - › Imodium® (loperamide) for diarrhea (loose, watery poop)
 - › Gravol™ (dimenhydrinate) for mild nausea
 - › Benadryl® (diphenhydramine) for mild itching
 - › Zantac® (ranitidine) for acid indigestion
- Gravol™ and Benadryl® can make you feel tired and/or dizzy. Do not use more than recommended on the package.
- Talk with your pharmacist before taking any over-the-counter medication to make sure it will not interact with any other medications you are taking.

How long will the withdrawal process take?

- Usually, most withdrawal symptoms stop after 3 days of not using alcohol. You may still have some symptoms, especially anxiety or trouble sleeping.
- Craving alcohol usually stops, but can happen every once in a while. This is normal.
- You will know you are getting to the end of withdrawal when the symptoms get weaker and happen less often.

What will happen after the withdrawal process?

- Near the end of the withdrawal process, the Withdrawal Management Unit's discharge planner will work with you on your plan for ongoing recovery/addiction treatment.
- Recovery is different for everyone. We suggest that you continue ongoing recovery work after your alcohol withdrawal. Scientific studies show that working on your recovery every day can improve your chance of reaching your overall recovery goals.

- Your nurse will confirm with you and your support person when you have completed the withdrawal process and no longer need medication. They will help to answer any questions you may have.
- A discharge planner will also call you to see how you are doing after the withdrawal process. They will help make sure you will be able to continue with your recovery after this pilot is over.

How do I contact the Withdrawal Management Unit?

- You and your support person may call the Withdrawal Management Unit at any time during this pilot.
 - › Phone: 902-425-1099
 - › Hours: 24 hours a day, 7 days a week
- You can also call the Mental Health Mobile Crisis Team:
 - › Phone (toll-free): 1-888-429-8167
 - › Hours: 24 hours a day, 7 days a week
- **Call 911 or go to the nearest Emergency Department if you have any of the symptoms listed on page 6.**

How can I give feedback on the pilot?

- **We welcome your feedback.** You can give feedback on the home-based withdrawal management pilot by:
 - › Completing the feedback form you were given at the in-person assessment. This feedback is confidential and will help us improve the home-based withdrawal process.
- You can give feedback on your experiences with Nova Scotia Health by:
 - › Phone (toll-free): 1-844-884-4177
 - › 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 Authority 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.