

# facts facts



## Contacts

For more information contact 1300 368 186

Family Drug Support  
PO Box 7363  
Leura NSW 2780  
Phone (02) 4782 9222  
www.fds.org.au

## Other Services

- Limited counselling and family therapy
- Family support groups
- Bereavement contact
- Drug education kits
- Referral to drug and alcohol treatment
- Rehabilitation programs



# Supporting someone through Detox

## DETOXIFICATION (DETOX)

Withdrawal from the drug is called detoxification (detox) and is part of the recovery process. It is important not to see this step as a pass or fail test.

Home detoxification is not recommended for every drug, and is not really the best choice when a person is taking several drugs together eg: tranquillisers, alcohol and heroin.

## SYMPTOMS

Withdrawal symptoms will be mild or severe depending on:

- The drug
- The amount used and
- How long the person has been taking the drug

As the person stops using the drug their body has to readjust to working again without the drug. This takes time for both the physical body and mind to readjust. The person is also probably not going to be thinking very clearly. What you may see is that they are:

- Sweaty and hot and then get cold and have chicken skin (goosebumps)
- Showing signs and symptoms of a cold eg: runny eyes and nose and sneezing
- Grumpy and irritable
- Anxious
- Tired and not having much energy
- Often showing changes in their mood, one minute they feel OK, the next they feel depressed. Sometimes they may say they can't go on. This is normal

- Unable to sleep even though they are tired. Their body's sleeping pattern is re-adjusting and this may take several weeks
- Aggressive at times so ensure you and others are not at risk. This can happen with benzodiazepines, amphetamines and alcohol withdrawals
- Wanting to do things but seem to have trouble concentrating
- More tense in their muscles and joints which creates aches and pains
- Experiencing stomach or bowel upsets as the body readjusts. They may vomit and have diarrhoea and not feel like eating or drinking much
- Talking about urges or cravings to use the drug, that will come and go. Cravings are normal and are not a sign of lack of willpower or failure
- Sometimes angry, paranoid or seem disturbed. This is often the case with amphetamine withdrawal. Try not to take any upsetting things they say personally

## Your support role during withdrawal in your home

As a support person it is important to be positive, calm and create a safe atmosphere in the home. You need to remember that you can be a powerful influence for change in your family. You know the person and will, with a bit of preparation, be able to help. Spending time with the person particularly during the first week of symptoms may need you to re-organise your usual schedule.

It is useful to have an assessment to check if home detox is the best choice first and to organise for a doctor or drug and alcohol worker to provide advice. Contact the intake worker at the Detox Centre nearest you for information on how to arrange an assessment. ADIS (see your local phone directory) can advise of your nearest service. If you end up helping someone in their home it can be good to have others with you who can give you some 'time out'. Remember you can phone the FDS line for help at any time 24hrs, seven days.

You may have to take time off of work and get some additional assistance for looking after other family members such as younger children or elderly parents.

You will need to decide how to explain what is going to happening to them. You will also need to discourage drug-using friends of the person from visiting them during this time, and keep people away who may cause stress or arguments. If your family member has a home detox support worker they will be able to assist you and answer any questions you may have either by phone or when they visit.

If the person should fit, experience chest pains, become unconscious, hallucinate or have other worrying symptoms call an ambulance immediately Dial 000.

## YOU CAN HELP BY:

- **Understanding** that detox does not mean a cure
- Be willing to **listen** to the person
- **Helping the person to manage any physical pain and discomfort** eg: cramps, vomiting or diarrhoea. If the nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea is severe then medication such as Maxalon or Lomotil may be helpful. The person's doctor can help by prescribing this. You can also use acupuncture pressure points to encourage their stomach to settle.
- **Encouraging them to drink and eat small amounts of food.** It is important to make sure the person doesn't get dehydrated and that they take lots of fluid (about 2 litres a day), and take light food such as soup, rice, noodles, vegetables, and fruit
- **Being patient**
- Trying **not to argue** with the person at this time
- **Encouraging the person to relax** by reminding them of techniques they may know eg: controlled relaxed breathing, meditation, listening to tapes, music, relaxing in a shower or bath
- Helping to **distract and reassure the person with any cravings they may have** eg: Remind them of the D's listed below:
  - Do an activity eg: watch a video, play cards, listen to music
  - Delay - suggest and encourage them to put off the decision for an hour
  - Drink plenty - especially water
  - Discuss and remind them to look at their reasons for stopping
  - Do some gentle exercise and do this with them eg: go for a walk, do some stretching exercises, yoga, Tai Chi. Encourage them to ease aches and pains by having warm baths or spas

Remind them to contact other support people that are available in your area. These contacts can help both you and your family member. Know what to do if an emergency situation occurs. It is helpful if someone in the family understands some basic first aid skills. Avoid indepth counselling during detox as the person is vulnerable and having to cope with deep emotions may create more stress and not be helpful. Follow any advice given to you by health workers to prevent the spread of infection.