

Managing your withdrawal from alcohol at home

This handout provides information about withdrawing from alcohol at home

Prepared by Professor Kate Conigrave, Senior Staff Specialist, Drug Health Services, Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, Sydney; and Conjoint Professor in the Faculty of Medicine and Health, The University of Sydney; Associate Professor Rowena Ivers, General Practitioner at the Illawarra Aboriginal Medical Service, and Associate Professor in the Faculty of Medicine and Health, The University of Sydney; Associate Professor Kirsten Morley, Associate Professor in Addiction Medicine, The University of Sydney; and Professor Paul Haber, Clinical Director, Drug Health Service, Sydney Local Health District, and Head of Discipline and Conjoint Professor, Addiction Medicine, The University of Sydney, Sydney, NSW.

Many alcohol-dependent people can safely undergo withdrawal from alcohol ('detoxification') at home if they are supervised by their GP. Taking the drug diazepam assists with the symptoms of alcohol withdrawal. For the patient's safety, diazepam is usually dispensed daily by a pharmacist or practice nurse.

This patient handout contains important reminders of what your GP would have already discussed with you when they suggested that detoxification at home would be appropriate for you.

If you get withdrawal symptoms in the first week after you stop drinking (e.g. the shakes, bad sleep), diazepam can help these. When properly supervised by a doctor or nurse, diazepam can make withdrawal safer and easier. It is only used for the first week. If you use it longer, then there is a risk that you could become addicted to it.

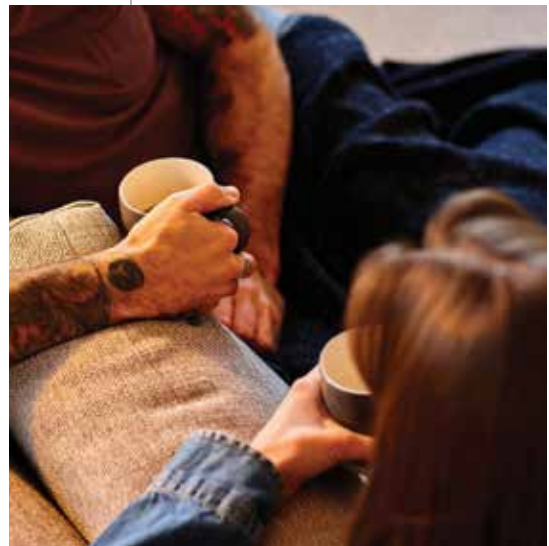
It is important to follow the instructions below to avoid harms from using diazepam, such as injury. Your doctor also may organise for you to pick up the diazepam once a day.

On the next page, the charts show examples of the maximum dose that you may need to manage your withdrawal symptoms. Your doctor can pick which schedule ('regimen') is best for you.

Some people need less medication. Other people find that this dose does not keep their symptoms under control, and their doctor may increase the dose. Sometimes the doctor will advise a person to go to hospital if their withdrawal is severe.

Instructions

- Do not take the diazepam if it is making you drowsy
- Do not take diazepam if you have been drinking that day
- Do not drive or use machinery while taking diazepam (or if you are shaky from withdrawal) and be careful when crossing roads
- If your withdrawal is getting worse (e.g. shakes, sweats increasing) come back to see the doctor or go to the Emergency Department



© DEAN MITCHELL/ISTOCKPHOTO.COM



COPY FOR YOUR PATIENTS
OR DOWNLOAD PDF
[www.medicinetoday.com.au/
patient-handouts](http://www.medicinetoday.com.au/patient-handouts)

Doctors may photocopy these pages for distribution to patients. Written permission is necessary for all other uses.

© MedicineToday 2018

This MedicineToday handout is provided only for general information purposes. The information may not apply to everyone and the handout is not a substitute for professional medical care and advice. Please discuss the information with your doctor.

- Keep diazepam out of reach of children
- Do not give your medicine to anyone else: a dose that may be safe for you may be dangerous for someone else
- Stop the diazepam within a week, so that you do not become dependent on it (addicted).

Your doctor will tell you which of the regimens you should use; or the doctor may design a different treatment plan for you.

Remember, if you feel drowsy (sleepy by day) then do not take the diazepam. **MT**

REGIMEN 1: FOR MODERATELY SEVERE WITHDRAWAL: DOSE OF DIAZEPAM 5MG TABLETS

Day	Maximum dose	Times (approximate)
Days 1 and 2	Two tablets, four times daily	6am, 12 midday, 6pm, 10pm
Day 3	Two tablets, three times daily	8am, 2pm, 10pm
Day 4	Two tablets, twice daily	8am, 10pm
Days 5 and 6	One to two tablets at night if needed	10pm
Day 7	One tablet at night if needed	10pm
Day 8	Cease	

REGIMEN 2: MILD-TO-MODERATE WITHDRAWAL: DOSE OF DIAZEPAM 5 MG TABLETS

Day	Maximum dose	Times (approximate)
Day 1	Two tablets, three times daily	6am, 2pm, 10pm
Day 2	Two tablets, twice daily	6am, 10pm
Day 3	Two tablets at night	10pm
Day 4	One tablet at night	10pm
Day 5	One tablet at night if needed	10pm
Day 6	Cease	

REGIMEN 3: MILD WITHDRAWAL: DOSE OF DIAZEPAM 5 MG TABLETS

Day	Maximum dose	Times (approximate)
Day 1	Two tablets, twice daily	6am, 10pm
Day 2	One tablet, twice daily	6am, 10pm
Day 3	One to two tablets at night	10pm
Day 4	Cease	

TO THE DOCTOR

Select the appropriate regimen for the patient, based on predicted withdrawal severity as described in the article 'Using medicines to treat alcohol dependence in general practice' (*Medicine Today* 2018; 19(12): 24-32).

Strike through the regimens that are not to be followed.

Below, circle the one you are recommending to the patient.

TO THE PATIENT

Please follow the instructions in the regimen circled below:

- Regimen 1
- Regimen 2
- Regimen 3
- Other plan provided by your GP



COPY FOR YOUR PATIENTS OR DOWNLOAD PDF
www.medicinetoday.com.au/patient-handouts

Doctors may photocopy these pages for distribution to patients. Written permission is necessary for all other uses.

© MedicineToday 2018

This MedicineToday handout is provided only for general information purposes. The information may not apply to everyone and the handout is not a substitute for professional medical care and advice. Please discuss the information with your doctor.