



Psychosocial Strategies to Manage Substance Withdrawal - CADS

Environmental strategies and personal support

A safe and supportive environment can make all the difference:

- Organise support people to stay or visit – not only will this help you to stay motivated but they can also screen phone calls and knocks at the door (“Sorry, he/she’s not available/gone away for a couple of weeks”).
- It can be a good idea to remove your SIM card from your phone or even to delete the phone numbers of people you buy from or use substances with. It can be really difficult to withdraw if the people you live with are using, or you have friends and acquaintances phoning or dropping around with substances when you’re trying to stop.
- Ensure the environment is free from substances and anything that reminds you of using substances (for example pictures of drugs or drug using associates).
- Have activities readily available to help alleviate boredom and distraction from ‘craving’ periods (i.e., DVDs, books, games).
- Ensure there is plenty of fluid and a variety of healthy foods available.
- Ensure your support people know how to access medical support if required, especially after hours.
- No matter where you do your planned withdrawal and no matter how bad you feel, it is better to get out of bed, have a shower and do something. Staying in bed can make you feel even worse mentally and physically – it’s really hard to get comfortable for a start. Having someone there to get you up and get you organised is a huge help especially when you’re really feeling the withdrawal.

Practical strategies to cope with common withdrawal symptoms

An understanding of withdrawal symptoms and the difficulties associated with coping with these and substance cravings is a useful place to start. Below are some common withdrawal symptoms and some practical suggestions. Remember you will need to discover what works best for you. Your support people are likely to know you well – they might help you consider what works best for you.

Disturbed sleep

- Reduce caffeinated drinks (coffee, tea, cola, energy drinks) during the day and have none after 2.00pm
- Eat little and often and avoid heavy, spicy meals late at night
- Avoid napping during the day and keep to regular bed and wake times
- Exercise regularly (in the day, not after 6pm)
- Use relaxation techniques, have a bath in the evening
- Taking sleeping pills should be considered very carefully as some of these medications are addictive in themselves.

Muscle cramps and aches, sweating/hot and cold flushes

- Have regular showers or baths
- Use a heat rub/wheat bag. Massage can help.
- Do gentle exercise, e.g., walking.
- Paracetamol or ibuprofen – take as directed on the packet.

Issued by	CADS Document Controller	Issued Date	May 2014	Classification	058.055
Authorised by	CADS Clinical Director	Review Period	36 months	Page	Page 1 of 2

This information is correct at date of issue. Always check in the relevant Waitemata DHB policy manual that this copy is the most recent version.



Psychosocial Strategies to Manage Substance Withdrawal - CADS

Poor appetite

- Eat little and often
- Try a nutritional supplement drink
- Avoid heavy, greasy, sweet or rich foods
- Drink 6-8 glasses of water a day
- Multivitamins may help

Constipation/diarrhoea

- Drink plenty of fluids and be regular with your meals
- Have a high fibre diet
- For severe constipation eat fresh fruit, prunes or kiwifruit
- For severe diarrhoea try loperamide (Imodium) – take as directed on the packet.

Nausea/vomiting

- Drink plenty of fluids, and eat little and often
- Rehydration/sports/isotonic drinks such as 'Powerade' can be helpful
- If vomiting, stop eating solid food and try small sips of liquid, or sucking an ice cube. Try a small amount of food once you have kept fluids down for a few hours
- If vomiting persists please see your GP.

Anxiety/restlessness

- Relaxation exercises (deep breathing, muscle relaxation) can be helpful
- Use relaxation tapes
- Reduce caffeine intake.

Cravings

- Cravings are intense thoughts and feelings compelling a person to use again that are extremely difficult to resist.
- Cravings will pass! Distract yourself, keep busy (watch a film; clean the house; cook; listen to music; go for a walk; talk to friends etc.).
- Cravings get easier to cope with the longer you abstain.
- Remove any reminders of use as these intensify cravings.
- Focus on what is happening at the moment and take each hour and day as it comes.
- Reward yourself each time you get through a period of craving. It is a definite achievement.

Issued by	CADS Document Controller	Issued Date	May 2014	Classification	058.055
Authorised by	CADS Clinical Director	Review Period	36 months	Page	Page 2 of 2

This information is correct at date of issue. Always check in the relevant Waitemata DHB policy manual that this copy is the most recent version.