



## SUPPORTING SOMEONE THROUGH DETOX

**Withdrawal from a 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 it is not really the best choice when a person is taking several drugs together e.g. tranquillisers, alcohol and heroin.

### Symptoms

Withdrawal symptoms will be mild or severe, depending on:

- The kind of drug used
- The amount used
- How long the drug has been used for.

When the person stops using the drug, the body and mind take time to readjust physically, emotionally and mentally. This takes time for both the physical body and the

mind to readjust. The person is also probably not going to be thinking very clearly. Some typical symptoms will be:

- Sweaty and hot, and then get cold and have chicken skin (goosebumps)
- Showing signs and symptoms of a cold e.g.: runny eyes and nose and sneezing
- Grumpy, irritable and anxious
- Tired and not having much energy
- Often showing changes in their mood – one minute they feel okay, the next they feel depressed
- Sometimes they may say they can't go on – this is quite normal
- Wanting to do things, but they seem to

have trouble concentrating

- Tense in their muscles and joints, which creates aches and pains.

They may experience stomach or bowel upsets as the body readjusts. They may vomit and have diarrhoea and not feel like eating or drinking much.

A person going through detox may talk about urges or cravings to use the drug – these will come and go. Cravings are normal, and are not a sign of lack of willpower or failure.

Sometimes they may be angry, paranoid or seem disturbed. This is often the case with amphetamine withdrawal. Try not to take any upsetting things they say personally. If the

acupuncture pressure points to encourage their stomach to settle.

Encourage 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 two litres a day), along with light food such as soup, rice, noodles, vegetables, and fruit.

Be patient, and try not to argue with the person at this time. Encourage the person to relax by reminding them of techniques they may know e.g. controlled relaxed breathing, meditation, listening to tapes, music, relaxing in a shower or bath.

Help to distract and reassure the person with any cravings they may have. Encourage them to use the list of D's listed below:

- *Do* an activity e.g. watch a video, play cards, listen to music
- *Delay* - suggest and encourage them to put off the decision to give up on detox, for at least 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 e.g. go for a walk, do some stretching exercises, yoga, Tai Chi, and 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 in depth 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.

### Lapses after detox

A lapse may raise a lot of fear for families. You may have just started to relax, breathing a sigh of relief, believing the drug problem is all sorted out and the chaos is over. It is important to understand that a lapse is part of the recovery process. The key to your family member getting through a lapse is having support and encouragement to get back on track. The experience of a lapse can often clarify for them what they have already learnt about recovery, and highlight areas that may be their triggers and where they need extra support or coping strategies.

It is our attitude and responses that are important. If a lapse is seen as a crisis or a failure, rather than as a common detour on the journey, it can have a negative and damaging impact on the user.

Don't forget they have taken a big step forward in attempting treatment and should always be praised, even if things do not go as planned.

## Your support role in home detox

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 require re-organising your usual schedule.

It is useful to have a professional 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. Detoxes from drugs like alcohol or benzodiazepines can be dangerous and may need careful medical supervision. Contact the intake worker at the detox centre nearest you for information on how to arrange an assessment. The Alcohol & Drug Information Service in your State 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 support at any time 24 hours, seven days a week.

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

You will 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 begins fitting, experiences chest pains, becomes unconscious, hallucinates or has other worrying symptoms, call an ambulance immediately dial 000.