

What can I expect?

Prolonged heavy drinking alters brain chemicals and stops the brain from working properly.

When you first drink, the alcohol helps increase the brain chemical that makes you feel relaxed and calm. At the same time, it reduces the action of another brain chemical that makes you feel happy and excited.

When heavy drinkers suddenly stop or reduce their drinking a lot, these chemicals suddenly rebound into action.

This causes the classical alcohol withdrawal symptoms: anxiety, irritability, agitation, tremors, seizures and hallucinations. In some cases, this can have life-threatening effects.

Medications we use

We use medication to make detoxification from alcohol safer and more comfortable. The medicines during detox stop or reduce some of the sudden changes in the brain and keep you safe.

Chlordiazepoxide (Librium)

This is used to treat alcohol withdrawal symptoms. It helps to slow down the activity in the brain and reduces nervous tension (anxiety) and muscle spasm.

However, it can also cause drowsiness. Too much can make you too drowsy and too little can make you feel “twitchy” - so it is important for us to know how much you

are drinking, so we can get the dose just right for you.

You will be given a gradual reducing dose over a period of 7-10 days, which can be adjusted as needed.

Pabrinex (Vitamin B1)

Vitamin B1 is important for good functioning of your brain, including memory. People who drink too much alcohol usually have a lack of vitamin B in the body, due to a poor diet and frequently missed meals. Alcohol also stops your body absorbing vitamin B.

Pabrinex contains Vitamin B1 and is given through an injection into a muscle, twice daily for three days. It gets the vitamins in fast to prevent a sudden drop in levels.

The Pabrinex injections are uncomfortable but essential to prevent seizures, irreversible brain and nerve damage and even death.

Thiamine (Vitamin B1)

As well as Pabrinex injections, you will also be given Vitamin B1 tablets (thiamine).

Thiamine is lacking in people who have been drinking a lot. If not treated, it can lead to permanent brain damage and damage to nerve and blood vessels in your hands and feet. It is important to continue taking this after the alcohol detoxification.

Vitamin B Co Strong

This contains a high concentration of the B Vitamins. It is used to prevent long-term damage to blood vessels, nerves and skin.

Acamprosate

Acamprosate can reduce craving in some people. We do not fully understand how it works, but it seems to protect brain cells from dying during an alcohol detoxification.

Your GP can continue prescribing this. You should take this for six to nine months to help manage your cravings. Some people get side effects such as diarrhoea, nausea, vomiting and abdominal pain, but these are usually mild and short lasting.

Naltrexone

Naltrexone helps to reduce craving in some people. It can also reduce the pleasurable effect of alcohol if you drink again after a detoxification. It was first used to treat opiate addicts, but it also works really well for people with alcohol problems. It can help reduce anxiety symptoms (if taken for several weeks). It has few side-effects; headaches and gut problems, but these are usually mild and short-lived.

If you take naltrexone, other medications containing opiates will not work, for example some pain killers. Other non-opiate medications will need to be used instead.

Other medications

Experienced staff will look after you during the detoxification.

We can offer you a range of other medications to help with other symptoms such as diarrhoea, nausea, vomiting, muscle spasm, anxiety and problems sleeping.

Psychological support

To stay dry in the long-term, medicines are not the full solution. You will need other psychological support, such as structured programmes, groups or 1-1 activities.

Family or peer support and mutual aid groups such as AA and SMART are also key to staying abstinent and in recovery.

Contact us

Blackberry Hill Hospital
Manor Road
Fishponds
Bristol
BS16 2EW

Telephone:
(Acer ward) 0117 378 7980
(Blackberry centre) 0117 378 4500

PALS

To make a comment, raise a concern or make a complaint, please contact the Trust's Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS).

Tel: 01225 362900
Free phone: 0800 073 1778
Email: awp.PALS@nhs.net

Other formats and languages

If you need this information in other formats (such as large print, Braille) or in another language, please call the PALS number.

Lead: Head of Practice & Profession
Leaflet code: AWP 357
Approval date: April 2015
Review date: April 2018



Avon and Wiltshire
Mental Health Partnership
NHS Trust

Your Alcohol Detoxification

A guide to the
medications we use

You matter, we care