

Alcohol withdrawal medications

Diazepam

Diazepam and other benzodiazepine type medications have a similar effect to alcohol on receptors in the brain. Diazepam is commonly prescribed to relieve alcohol withdrawal symptoms.

During a medicated alcohol withdrawal (4-6 days) the dose of diazepam will be reduced. This allows the body time to adjust and reduces the severity of alcohol withdrawal symptoms [*see over page for Alcohol withdrawal symptoms*]. It is important to take diazepam as directed.

Common side effects of diazepam include sleepiness, dizziness and feeling unsteady

Driving is NOT recommended during the early stages of a medicated alcohol withdrawal. If you are thinking of driving or have any questions talk to your CHDS nurse

Alcohol and diazepam can be dangerous if consumed together. We will need to stop the medicated alcohol withdrawal if alcohol is consumed.

Thiamine

Thiamine is another name for Vitamin B1 which is needed by the body to keep tissues healthy. Thiamine is prescribed to lift the low levels of thiamine in the body and brain caused by alcohol use. Low thiamine levels can lead to memory problems or confusion including a form of dementia called *Korsakoff's Syndrome* or a serious brain disorder called *Wernicke's Encephalopathy*. It can also cause problems with nerves in your feet and hands call *peripheral neuropathy*.

The usual dose of thiamine is **one tablet (50mgs) four times a day for at least 1 month**. It is important to complete the full prescription following alcohol withdrawal.

Multivitamins

The multivitamin tablets that are prescribed contain Vitamin A, B, B1 & B2, C & Vitamin D3. This is to restore nutrients that are often lost during long term alcohol use. The supplements should be taken regularly as prescribed.

Anti-nausea medication

Anti-nausea medication is prescribed to reduce the feeling of sickness or vomiting. The main medication prescribed is called metoclopramide. Take this medication only *when required* or when feeling sick and no more than every 8 hours (maximum of three tablets in 24 hours).

You may be prescribed alternative medications if metoclopramide is not effective.

Common side-effects of metoclopramide include restlessness, drowsiness or fatigue.

Medication Plan

Use this planner to help record times and doses to take diazepam during your medicated withdrawal

Time	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6

Alcohol withdrawal symptoms

It is normal to experience withdrawal symptoms when withdrawing from alcohol. Your body has adapted to regularly having alcohol in its system. When you stop drinking your body has to readjust. The medication you are given should reduce these symptoms. Tell your CHDS nurse if your alcohol withdrawal symptoms are getting worse or you are concerned.

Typical alcohol withdrawal symptoms include:

- Nausea - feeling sick and/or vomiting
- Shaky hands or tremors
- Sweating - you may feel hot and sweaty.
- Anxiety or agitation- a feeling of uneasiness and/or restlessness
- Numbness and/or tingling in the hands and feet
- Increased sensitivity to light or sound
- Headache or fullness in the head

Potentially serious withdrawal symptoms:

- Confusion or disorientation - not knowing what day it is or forgetting familiar names
- Auditory / visual hallucinations - hearing or seeing things that no one else can
- Seizure or ‘fitting’ – body shaking then becoming sleepy or drowsy when it stops



Uncontrolled alcohol withdrawal can be life threatening. Some people are at risk of having a withdrawal seizure or serious complications. In an **emergency or any life threatening situation call 111 for an ambulance**

For all **non-life threatening** concerns or questions contact:

Your CHDS nurse on 09 815 5830 extension Or (Mon-Fri 8.30am to 5pm)

After hours –CADS medically managed withdrawal unit 09 815 5839 (5pm to 8.30am or public holidays)

Alcohol and Drug help line - 0800 787 797 (24hrs / 7 days a week)

Healthline - 0800 611 116 (24hrs / 7 days a week)