

Alcohol Withdrawal Delirium

KEY POINTS

- Alcohol withdrawal delirium is severe or life-threatening symptoms after you stop drinking alcohol. This is also called delirium tremens (DTs).
 - If you have symptoms of the DTs, someone should take you to the emergency room right away.
 - Treatment for delirium tremens may include medicines, vitamins, and IV fluids. The symptoms of delirium tremens can last up to 10 days.
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What is alcohol withdrawal delirium?

Alcohol withdrawal delirium is severe symptoms after you stop drinking alcohol. This is also called delirium tremens (DTs). Delirium tremens can be life threatening. If you are dependent on alcohol, DTs may start 24 to 72 hours after you stop or decrease your drinking, or as long as 10 days. Not everyone who is dependent on alcohol will go through the DTs when they stop drinking. However, there is no way to predict who will go through DTs. If you are dependent on alcohol, do not try to stop drinking without help.

If you must stay in a place where you cannot drink, such as in the hospital or in jail after an accident, let a healthcare provider know that you are a heavy drinker. If you are not treated for DTs, you may have severe problems that could result in death.

What is the cause?

Alcohol changes the way your body and brain work. When you drink regularly and drink a lot, there are changes in the nerve cells and blood flow in your brain. As a result, you think about alcohol all the time and you don't feel good unless you drink more alcohol. When you stop drinking suddenly, there are changes in your brain, which cause the symptoms of alcohol withdrawal.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of the DTs include:

- Not knowing who or where you are
- Being very restless and not being able to sleep
- Seeing, hearing, or feeling something that is not there
- Believing things that are not true
- Having a fever
- Having seizures or going into a coma

The symptoms can last up to 10 days.

How is it diagnosed?

Delirium tremens is a medical emergency. Your healthcare provider will ask how much and how often you drink. Be honest about your drinking. Your provider needs this information to give you the right treatment. He or she will also ask about your symptoms and medical history, and give you a physical exam. You may have blood and urine tests.

How is it treated?

If you have symptoms of the DTs, someone should take you to the emergency room right away.

Treatment for DTs may include medicines, vitamins, and IV fluids.

How can I take care of myself?

The best way to help yourself is to see your healthcare provider and make plans to stop using alcohol. If you are already seeing a healthcare provider, it is important to follow the full course of treatment he or she prescribes.

Do not try to stop using alcohol "cold turkey" without medical advice. You need to follow your healthcare provider's advice because some symptoms can be life-threatening.

If you think you are dependent on alcohol, get help. People and resources in your community that can help you include your healthcare providers, therapists, peer support groups, mental health centers, and alcohol or substance abuse treatment programs. You may want to contact:

- Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)
212-870-3400
<https://www.aa.org/>
- Mental Health America
800-969-6642
<https://www.mhanational.org>

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