

## Drew's story

// Stopping drinking was hard. I'd tried cutting back before, but never lasted long on my own.

I talked to my GP and she referred me to a drug and alcohol agency. After discussing my options with them, I decided to do my withdrawal at home with the support of my partner. The agency helped us prepare and let us know what kind of symptoms I might experience, then my GP gave me some medication to help.

A nurse from the agency came to visit me regularly during my withdrawal. He was great – really friendly and encouraging, and happy to answer any questions we had. It's all a bit of a blur, but I know I didn't feel too great. After withdrawal, I did a couple of programs that really helped me work out how I was going to deal with life sober. I learnt about how to deal with cravings and triggers and to avoid a relapse. It's been 7 months since I last had a drink. I had a couple of slip ups along the way, but now I feel like I'm on track and I feel better than I have in ages. My problems haven't gone away, but I'm learning to deal with them in other ways instead of drinking. I'm sleeping better, eating better and, for the first time in a long time, I feel hopeful.

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## Contacts

If you want to talk to someone about your own or someone else's alcohol or other drug use, you can get more information from:

ReGen  
1800 700 514 (Freecall)  
contact@regen.org.au  
www.regen.org.au

### State-wide (Victoria):

DirectLine (24/7 service offering counselling, information and referral)  
1800 888 236  
www.directline.org.au

Department of Health Website  
<https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/alcohol-and-drugs>

### Support & information for drug users from other drug using peers:

Harm Reduction Victoria  
(03) 9329 1500  
www.hrvic.org.au

### Support for family members or friends affected by a loved one's use:

Family Drug Help  
1300 660 068  
www.familydrughelp.org.au

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Alcohol

Getting

support

## Getting started

### How do you know if your drinking is getting out of control? Will people judge you if you ask for help? Where do you start?

It can be a bit overwhelming when thinking about what to do, but there are a number of options available, including just talking to someone about where you're at and asking for advice about whether you need to change your drinking habits. The first thing to remember is that by recognising some of the reasons you want to change, you've already started on your journey.

## Changing your alcohol use

There's no simple 'cure' that will stop you feeling like you need to drink alcohol, or a single approach that suits everyone. There are a number of treatment options that can support longer term change, but most of them start with a period of withdrawal. This means clearing alcohol from your system and giving your body a chance to recover from the immediate impacts of your drinking.

Depending on how much you are drinking, it may not be a good idea to stop suddenly. In some cases, sudden alcohol withdrawal can lead to serious complications. It's important that you talk to a doctor or an alcohol and other drug treatment service to work out which will be the best (and safest) approach for you.

If you have a good relationship with your GP, this is a good place to start the conversation, or you can contact alcohol and other drug treatment services directly. There are also telephone and online counselling and referral services you can contact – there's a list of handy telephone numbers and websites on the back of this brochure.

## Withdrawing from alcohol

The physical symptoms of withdrawal from alcohol don't last forever. For most people, the worst is over within a week. After that, your appetite, mood and sleep patterns will start to improve and your general health is likely to have improved significantly. Psychologically, it can take a bit longer to get used to living without alcohol, but there are techniques you can use to manage the cravings – talk to your alcohol and other drug worker about them.

### Withdrawal symptoms you may experience

Everyone experiences withdrawal differently. Common symptoms of alcohol withdrawal include anxiety, restlessness, sweating, cravings for alcohol, feeling irritable, stomach cramps, nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea, trouble sleeping and nightmares. Less common withdrawal symptoms include tremors and hallucinations (seeing, hearing or feeling things that aren't there).

### Tips for getting through withdrawal

Withdrawing from alcohol can be uncomfortable, but there are a number of things you can do to help yourself through the process:

- Stay hydrated. Drink water, herbal teas or rehydration drinks regularly to help your body cope with any fluids you may be losing through sweating, vomiting or diarrhoea.
- Avoid greasy, fried food that may make you feel ill. Stick to small meals & snacks such as toast, soup & salad – these will be easier for your body to digest.
- Ask your doctor about medications and supplements that can support you through the process, including vitamins and minerals such as thiamine and magnesium.
- Accept that sleep might be more difficult than normal – doing some gentle exercise during the day and some relaxation exercises before bed can help you to wind down and feel tired enough to sleep. Your doctor may also be able to provide medication or suggest herbal remedies.

- Go easy on yourself! Most people have good days and bad days during withdrawal. Expect to feel strong cravings at times, as well as mood swings, feeling overwhelmed and feeling like it's all just too hard. Try and surround yourself with people who understand what you're trying to do and who will be encouraging and supportive.
- Ask for help – If something doesn't feel right, don't suffer in silence. Chances are, what you're experiencing is a regular symptom of withdrawal, but it's always worth checking.
- Don't give up hope. Withdrawal can be hard, but there are lots of people who have done it before you. Remember, the symptoms will end and you can move on to the next stage of your plan.

## What comes after withdrawal?

Withdrawal is an essential part of the process but, on its own, is no guarantee of ongoing success. Changing your thought processes and how you respond to different situations takes longer, particularly if you have been drinking for a long time. And it's not just your drinking that changes. Most areas of your life will be affected in some way. These changes will generally be for the better, but it's a big process and you may need supports to help you through the tough times and to help you to build upon the changes you made during withdrawal. This is where counselling, rehabilitation and peer-support programs can be helpful.

The more work you do on developing your skills to build on the changes you've made and the stronger your support network is, the better you'll be at coping with the various challenges you'll face. Your alcohol and other drug worker will be able to help you identify the supports you already have in place and what you can do to provide yourself with the best chance of achieving your goals.