

Medical Withdrawal from Opioids

Making the decision to address an opioid addiction isn't easy, but with the help of your healthcare professional you can be successful. A medical provider will help create a treatment plan for the painful symptoms of withdrawal. That typically includes a combination of medications and therapy.

Medications are used because of what opioids do to your brain. When you take opioids, they move through your blood and attach to certain brain cells or opioid receptors. Those cells then give off signals that relieve pain and increase feelings of pleasure. These drugs help wean people off opioids by attaching to the same brain cells the opioids would otherwise latch onto.

"The medications that help with opioid addiction are ones that work on the opioid receptor system in the body and they block opioid receptors."-Dr. Michael Miller, Addiction Medicine Physician

"The theory behind it is that you can slowly kind of taper back the amount that someone is using."-Matthew Hearing, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Biomedical Science

Methadone, buprenorphine and naltrexone are those medications commonly used to treat opioid addiction. They help ease cravings and withdrawal symptoms - such as nausea, body aches, insomnia, sweating, diarrhea and anxiety. The withdrawal medications also reduce the risk of relapse.

"The medications are really important and what we're seeing now is what they're particularly important for is blocking the receptors so there won't be an overdose. And so, the person is available to come back to counseling or NA the next day."- Dr. Michael Miller, Addiction Medicine Physician

Robyn Ellis is in recovery for opioid addiction. She went through several rounds of treatment before finding what worked for her. She was taking methadone in the early stages, which eased her symptoms of withdrawal.

"I didn't really go through withdrawal. It was just kind of uncomfortable."-Robyn, Patient

Your medical provider will determine type and dose of medications you need to treat your opioid addiction. It's very important that you follow their instructions consistently.

"For anyone prescribed methadone, they're going to be going to a community treatment center and get their doses based on a phase schedule which can change as they progress through their treatment. For someone who is prescribed buprenorphine or naltrexone, they'll be going to their providers office based on a schedule determined by that provider."-Sarah Joyce, Outpatient Program Manager

Your healthcare team will also monitor your overall health. Katie Schneider was closely watched when she started

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detox for an opioid addiction.

"They did give me medication to lower my blood pressure, to make the withdrawals not so difficult."-Katie, Patient

"There's so many misconceptions in this area. One of them is that when you give an opioid medication such as methadone or buprenorphine, you're substituting one addiction for another. When somebody is stabilized on these on these medications, you really have achieved the treatment goals of they're not high. They're not in withdrawal. That's not addiction, that's treating addiction."-Dr. Michael Miller, Addiction Medicine Physician

Your doctor will monitor you while taking withdrawal medications, but you should also talk to a mental health professional. They can help get to the root of your addiction – which could be things like anxiety or depression.

"When you're meeting with an individual therapist or participating in a day treatment program, we'll help you address those underlying issues that contributed to the substance use."- Sarah Joyce, Outpatient Program Manager

Whether it's one-on-one or in a group, therapy can also help you to recognize and avoid certain situations that might cause you to use drugs. Therapy helped both Robyn and Katie in recovery.

"I just really learned to open up to her. You know I had a trust with her and I could just really tell her anything."-Robyn, Patient

"It definitely helps to be open about the addictions and your stories and what you did all that with other people that were in the same position as you."-Katie, Patient

With the help of medication and therapy, you can ease those symptoms of withdrawal.

"If you're going to manage withdrawal, withdrawal management generally takes about a week."- Dr. Michael Miller, Addiction Medicine Physician

When starting recovery, talk to your healthcare provider. They can help guide you to the treatment plan that can put you on the path to a healthy addiction-free life.