**POST-ACUTE WITHDRAWL SYNDROME (PAWS)**

★ Brain dysfunction has been documented in 75-95% of alcoholics

**Stages of Withdrawal:**

**1. Acute Withdrawal:** Usually lasts 1-2 weeks. During this stage, you may experience physical withdrawal symptoms. But every drug is different, and every person is different.

**2. Post-Acute Withdrawal:** A group of symptoms that occur after acute withdrawal. In the alcoholic, these symptoms appear 14 days into abstinence, after stabilization from acute withdrawal. During this stage you'll have fewer physical symptoms, but more emotional and psychological withdrawal symptoms.

Post-acute withdrawal occurs because your brain chemistry is gradually returning to normal. As your brain improves the levels of your brain chemicals fluctuate as they approach the new equilibrium causing post-acute withdrawal symptoms.

**Most people experience some post-acute withdrawal symptoms***.* Whereas in the acute stage of withdrawal every person is different, in **post-acute withdrawal most people have the same symptoms.**

**Recovery from PAWS usually takes somewhere between six and 24 months.**

**The Most Common PAWS Symptoms Include:**

Inability to think clearly

Memory problems

Emotional overreactions or numbness

Sleep Disturbances

Problems with physical coordination

Stress sensitivity

**Post-acute withdrawal can feel like a rollercoaster of symptoms.** In the beginning, symptoms will change from minute to minute and hour to hour. Later as you recover further they will disappear for a few weeks or months only to return again. As you continue to recover the good stretches will get longer and longer. But the bad periods of post-acute withdrawal can be just as intense and last just as long.

**Each post-acute withdrawal episode usually lasts for a few days.** Once you've been in recovery for a while, you will find that each post-acute withdrawal episode usually lasts for a few days. There is no obvious trigger for most episodes.

**Post-acute withdrawal usually lasts for 2 years.**

**Tips on How to Survive PAWS:**

**Be patient.** You can't hurry recovery. But you can get through it one day at a time.

**Post-acute withdrawal symptoms are a sign that your brain is recovering.** But remember, even after one year, you are still only half way there.

**Go with the flow.** Withdrawal symptoms are uncomfortable. But the more you resent them the worse they'll seem. You'll have lots of good days over the next two years. Enjoy them. You'll also have lots of bad days. On those days, don't try to do too much. Take care of yourself, focus on your recovery, and you'll get through this.

**Practice self-care.** Give yourself lots of little breaks over the next two years. Recovery is the opposite of addiction. **Sometimes you'll have little energy or enthusiasm for anything. Understand this and don't over book your life. Give yourself permission to focus on your recovery.**

**Post-acute withdrawal can be a trigger for relapse.** You'll go for weeks without any withdrawal symptoms, and then one day you'll wake up and your withdrawal will hit you like a ton of bricks.

**Being able to relax will help you through post-acute withdrawal.** When you're tense you tend to dwell on your symptoms and make them worse. When you're relaxed it's easier to not get caught up in them.

* **Talk about what you are experiencing** with your Twelve Step peers, sponsor,
* counselor, therapist, or family—anyone who will not criticize or minimize your
* experiences.
* **Become a "Monday morning quarterback"—**carefully reviewing the events that
* preceded the flare-up of your PAWS symptoms, and your reaction to them.

**Consider starting a journal** to document your experiences and identifying alternative ways of responding next time.

**Exercise regularly**. Exercise causes the brain to release chemicals that make you feel good. Stretching – to reduce muscle tension – and aerobic exercise such as running, biking, or swimming, are recommended for those in recovery.

**Eat a well-balanced diet**. Proper nutrition is important in recovery. What you eat has a great deal to do with the level of stress you experience and your body’s ability to cope with PAWS symptoms.

**Spirituality.** Belief in a power great than yourself gives your life meaning and purpose. Spiritual discipline includes prayer, meditation, fellowship, and regular inventory of spiritual growth.