



First Nations Health Authority  
Health through wellness

# Supporting People with Alcohol Dependency during COVID-19

## Reducing Alcohol Consumption Abruptly can be Dangerous



During the pandemic, most of us are living more isolated lives to prevent the spread of the virus. We are either home alone or spending time only with the family members who live in the same household. This situation can be especially challenging for individuals who are dependent on alcohol.

### **ALCOHOL CAN BE A COPING MECHANISM**

Some of our family members may be using alcohol as a way to cope during this crisis, while others may be drinking heavily on a daily basis or in binges and need access to alcohol. Some family members may feel pressured to reduce their alcohol consumption or to stop drinking altogether. Others may no longer have access to alcohol and might seek out other sources to self-medicate.

We need to support each other with compassion and lateral kindness during this time of uncertainty. Reduced alcohol use can lead to physical and psychological symptoms. An abrupt loss of access to alcohol can lead to a state of acute alcohol withdrawal or, in severe cases, a life-threatening medical emergency.

## TIPS FOR SUPPORTING PEOPLE WITH ALCOHOL DEPENDENCY

- Learn to spot the signs of alcohol withdrawal and how to manage symptoms.
- Explore options to manage alcohol withdrawal by talking to your community health workers.
- Be open to the idea that a loved one continuing their regular use of alcohol in appropriate quantities may be the safest option at this time, particularly if your community has limited access to medical professionals.
- Learn about drinking safely during the pandemic [here](#).

## MILD TO MODERATE SYMPTOMS

Mild to moderate symptoms of alcohol withdrawal can appear as early as 2–12 hours after a person stops drinking. The symptoms usually peak 24–72 hours after their last drink and may last for several days. Symptoms include:

- Anxiety or nervousness
- Irritability
- Feeling depressed
- Feeling tired
- Shakiness
- Mood swings
- Not being able to think clearly
- Having nightmares
- Large pupils
- Sweating
- Headaches
- Difficulty sleeping
- Nausea and/or vomiting
- Loss of appetite
- Faster heart rate
- Pale skin
- Uncontrollable twitching

Lying down in a quiet room with dim lighting, being in a positive and supportive environment, eating healthy foods, and drinking lots of fluids can ease symptoms. If symptoms are causing discomfort, consult with a health professional. A doctor may be able to prescribe medications to help withdrawal symptoms and manage alcohol cravings.

## SEVERE SYMPTOMS

Severe symptoms of alcohol withdrawal usually emerge 2–5 days after a person stops drinking. Symptoms include:

- Fever
- Extreme agitation
- Extreme confusion
- Hallucinations – feeling, seeing, or hearing things that are not there.
- Seizures – a person may fall down, shake, stiffen, vomit, drool, lose bowel control, stare off into space or have jerky body movements. After a seizure ends, a person may feel sleepy and will not remember what happened.

**If these symptoms appear, seek medical attention immediately.**

**Hospitalization may be necessary. Severe symptoms can result in death if untreated.**