

Medical Detox Admission and Next-Step Checklist

Use this guide while arranging withdrawal care and the treatment that follows. The checklist organizes a clinical handoff; it does not tell you how to detox at home or choose your own level of care.

Withdrawal care and recovery care have different jobs

Withdrawal care addresses the symptoms and medical risks that can occur when a substance is stopped or reduced. For alcohol, medical detox can help stabilize a person, but it does not by itself provide all the skills and continuing support involved in treatment. Ask how the withdrawal service connects you with ongoing care rather than assuming discharge completes treatment. [1]

Get medical guidance before changing use

After heavy, prolonged drinking, suddenly stopping alcohol can cause dangerous withdrawal. Suddenly stopping or rapidly reducing a benzodiazepine can also cause severe withdrawal, including seizures. Contact a clinician for a personal plan; do not use another person's taper or change prescribed medicines to fit an admission date. [2] [3]

Do not wait for admission during an emergency

Call 911 for a seizure, serious breathing difficulty, inability to awaken or another immediate physical danger. If an opioid overdose is possible, give naloxone if available while emergency help is being called, and stay with the person. A booked admission is not emergency coverage. [4] [3] [5]

What the assessment needs

Prepare accurate information, not a perfect history [6] [3]

- Tell the team which substances and medicines you use, how much when known, the last use and current symptoms. Say when you are unsure.
- Describe previous withdrawal problems, seizures or hospital care, other health conditions, and any pregnancy or possible pregnancy.
- Bring your medicine list and the names of clinicians already treating you. Ask the admitting team which medicines to bring and what instructions apply before arrival.
- Ask where medical support is available and what happens if your needs exceed what the service can provide.

Make the next step concrete

A continuing-care plan should connect the next service, medication arrangements where appropriate, and recovery support. A referral name is a starting point, not a confirmed appointment. Record who will arrange the appointment and how you will know it is booked. [6]

Example handoff

Hypothetical example: "The discharge note says outpatient follow-up. Can we call together before I leave, confirm whether the clinic can provide the care I need, and write down the appointment and transport plan?"

Keep notes private. Write or type short notes. Use another copy if you need more room. Save and reopen the PDF to check your answers.

Admission arrangements

Where to go and who confirmed it

Service, address, arrival date/time, phone and instructions if symptoms change before arrival.

Health and withdrawal information to report

Substances/medicines, recent changes, prior withdrawal problems and current concerns; discuss privately with the clinical team.

What to bring and who may receive updates

Requested documents/medicines, practical items and your communication preferences.

Before discharge

Next care and medicine access

Named service, confirmed appointment, written medicine instructions and how to obtain prescriptions or next doses.

Travel, housing and chosen support

Who will help with which task, and anything still not arranged.

Unfinished handoff

The missing answer, the person responsible and when/how you will follow up.

Keep completed notes private. Share only what you choose with the people helping you. These are original educational and planning prompts, not a validated assessment.

Useful next steps

[Find treatment services](https://findtreatment.gov/)

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[Read NIAAA's explanation of detox and ongoing treatment](https://alcoholtreatment.niaaa.nih.gov/FAQs-searching-alcohol-treatment)

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Sources

[1] [NIAAA: Alcohol treatment FAQs](https://alcoholtreatment.niaaa.nih.gov) (alcoholtreatment.niaaa.nih.gov)

[2] [NIAAA: Should You Cut Down or Quit?](https://rethinkingdrinking.niaaa.nih.gov) (rethinkingdrinking.niaaa.nih.gov)

[3] [FDA: Benzodiazepine boxed-warning safety communication](https://www.fda.gov/oc/2018/benzodiazepine-boxed-warning-safety-communication) (fda.gov)

[4] [CDC: Preventing Opioid Overdose](https://www.cdc.gov/od/oc/media/press-releases/2017/s170627-opioid-overdose-prevention.htm) (cdc.gov)

[5] [SAMHSA: 988 versus 911](https://www.samhsa.gov/988) (samhsa.gov)

[6] [NIAAA: Questions for alcohol treatment programs](https://alcoholtreatment.niaaa.nih.gov) (alcoholtreatment.niaaa.nih.gov)