



Knowledge helps prevent relapse

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What is PAWS (Post Acute Withdrawal Syndrome) and how does it relate to addiction?

Having worked with the chemically dependent population in both a residential setting and seeing individuals in outpatient therapy, I know that most in early recovery have or will experience it.

PAWS is not limited to just the recovering individual but also includes those who are not attending a recovery program but have stopped their alcohol or drug abuse.

There are two stages of withdrawal, one being the acute stage, which is more physical, and the second stage, dealing with the emotional and psychological withdrawal. Symptoms of withdrawal may include:

- Irritability
- Problems with concentration
- Moodiness
- Fluctuations in energy
Anxiousness
Low frustration tolerance
- Sleep disturbance
- Extreme sensitivity, overreaction to situations

This list is not all inclusive, but most of the above are quite prevalent. For many, these symptoms may last from six to 18 months. They can vary in severity as well as duration.

Some may experience symptoms that last only a few days and then they may not occur again for a week or more.

However, as the individual remains clean and sober and begins to make

positive changes in his or her life and attends a program to support these changes, these symptoms subside.

It is important that the recovering person knows to expect this phenomenon so there are no surprises. In working with the newly recovering addicts/alcoholics, this knowledge needs to be emphasized. This may help to prevent relapses.

One of the slogans in the 12-step program is "one day at a time." Remember that addiction did not happen overnight and recovery is a lifelong process that is well worth the time, effort and even the uncomfortable feelings that an individual may experience early in recovery.

As I referenced an article on the website addictionsandrecovery.org, some suggestions on how to survive PAWS from the book "I Want to Change My Life" by Dr. Steven Melemis included:

Be patient: Time is on your side. "Post-acute withdrawal symptoms are a sign that your brain is recovering. They are the result of your brain chemistry gradually going back to normal."

Go with the flow: You will have good days and bad ones. On the bad days, find the positives in your life and practice gratitude, be good to yourself and know that you can get through this.

Practice self-care: Do not take on too much, do not get overwhelmed by others' expectations of you, lower your stress as much as possible by getting enough sleep, eating balanced meals

and exercising (which applies to all of us).

Recovery becomes less of a struggle and more of a way of life as time moves on. You can deal with life on life's terms as you begin to regain emotional health.