

Addiction and Recovery: Do You Need Detox After Relapse?

By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.

Addiction merits treatment as the chronic illness it is, with recovery being a gradual process. Progress often involves a series of starts and stops. Relapse is a common symptom of addiction, as it is with most chronic illnesses. While predictable and preventable, relapse remains a fact of life within addiction and recovery dynamics.

Upon relapse, individuals might find it challenging to re-engage with recovery groups and support systems due to feelings of guilt or shame. However, for individuals in relapse who are returning to recovery, questions regarding the necessity of detox are commonplace.

Depending on the drug(s) of choice, dosage(s), and duration of relapse, some individuals may find formal detox assistance appropriate or even essential. Withdrawal symptoms vary across a continuum of severity from mild (e.g., headache, mild anxiety, sleep disturbance, irritability, gastrointestinal distress) to severe (e.g., severe anxiety, agitation, heart racing and palpitations, repeated vomiting, sweats and chills, and increased blood pressure.) The most severe symptoms (Delirium tremens) could involve fever, hallucinations, seizures, agitation, and confusion. DTs can be life-threatening and demand medical attention immediately.

Cravings are typically a part of detox and can be mild to severe. Anyone with detox symptoms would be well-advised to consult with their medical provider, not only to seek advice about detox but to keep them in the loop about all their health issues. Professionals best treat severe detox symptoms. After detox, whether through crisis stabilization or supervised self-detox, healthcare professionals may recommend outpatient or inpatient treatment. Detox services may range from home detox supervised by a primary care physician to a formal inpatient detox facility

with medical supervision through detox. Some people will need to go to the hospital for a medically assisted detox, involving medication and potentially other medical interventions.

Each person facing physical detox issues should have a healthcare professional assess their symptoms for severity, possible complications, and necessary services. A history of problematic detox or severe presenting symptoms indicates a need for professional attention. Considering previous detox experiences is crucial, as they typically worsen as the severity of addiction progresses over time. Consulting with a primary care physician about one's history of substance abuse and current detox situation is advisable for most individuals, if for no other reason than to keep their medical provider apprised of their health issues.

While anyone who is trying to re-establish abstinence should not take detox lightly, many people do not require formal or medical detox services, experiencing flu-like symptoms instead. Although uncomfortable, these symptoms typically do not warrant hospitalization.

A re-establishment of abstinence and recovery possibly involves not only detox but also a need for another, more intensive level of care. For individuals trying to maintain abstinence in a 12-step program alone, the next level would be formal treatment. Outpatient treatment is the less restrictive level of care, but continuing difficulty with re-establishing abstinence may call for environmental protections and the intense focus of inpatient treatment. For those with a history of multiple failed attempts at inpatient treatment followed by relapse, a long-term inpatient treatment facility may offer the most appropriate level of care.

Many people, depending on the duration and severity of relapse, can benefit from simply rededicating their efforts, returning to outpatient counseling and stepping up their involvement in 12-step groups. It's essential to recognize that addiction demands ongoing personal and professional attention throughout one's lifetime. Relapse is part of the recovery journey, which is often challenging and frustrating. Despite setbacks, persistence is critical to successful recovery. Most people who keep trying eventually can establish recovery and enjoy long-term sobriety.

Note: This article has been revised and edited from its original version, which was previously published in 2009 on this site. The content has been updated for contemporary language, clarity and accuracy.

Reclaiming sobriety post-relapse entails more than just abstaining from substances; it's about fortifying yourself against potential relapses. In "Understanding Cross Addiction to Prevent Relapse," you'll uncover the dangers of underestimating the allure of other mood-altering substances during recovery. This ebook equips you with proactive strategies, empowering you to safeguard your sobriety and forge a path towards enduring recovery.

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