

Post Acute Withdrawal Syndrome (PAWS)

PAWS can last anywhere from six to two years after the last use, though symptoms tend to peak in intensity over the first three to six months of abstinence.

The severity of post acute withdrawal symptoms appears to be primarily impacted by two factors:

- ◆ The amount and degree of brain dysfunction or disruption that has been caused by the length of use, the type of chemicals used, and any injuries that occurred associated with the use
- ◆ Stress factors experienced early in the recovery process and the severity of the psychological and social stressors that may occur

Cognitive and memory related symptoms of PAWS:

- ◆ Hard time learning and remembering new information
- ◆ Both short-term and long-term memory can be affected
- ◆ Inability to handle stress or uncertain situations
- ◆ Fuzziness of thinking, an inability to think clearly or logically
- ◆ Difficulty with solving problems and abstract reasoning
- ◆ Difficulty concentrating for any length of time or blanking out
- ◆ All or nothing, black and white thinking
- ◆ Rigid and repetitive thinking
- ◆ Having a difficult time prioritizing goals and putting them into action

Emotional symptoms of PAWS:

- ◆ Inability to sleep soundly
- ◆ Having nightmares or dreams about using alcohol or drugs
- ◆ Emotional symptoms are increased due to lack of sleep
- ◆ A frequent occurrence of radical mood swings
- ◆ Difficulty to relate to others
- ◆ Disproportionate emotions for a situation, for example flying into a rage over a small incident
- ◆ Having inappropriate emotions

Prolonged drug use changes the brain in fundamental and long lasting ways. Individuals addicted to drugs will need help and treatment to cope with these changes in the brain and attempt to change the brain back to normal.

Source: "Core Addictions Practice – Participant's Resource Guide"; Fraser Health Authority, Vancouver Island Authority, Interior Health Authority; June 2008