

Returning home after substance withdrawal

Risks for driving and other activities



After you stop using substances, you may experience uncontrolled body movements: withdrawal seizures. This can be dangerous during certain activities and especially when driving a vehicle. Here are some tips to help you manage these situations.

What are withdrawal seizures?

Like all seizures, withdrawal seizures cause involuntary and sudden muscle contractions. These movements can affect one or more limbs but also sometimes the whole body. Withdrawal seizures are due to suddenly stopping the use of substances. The risk of seizures can last several weeks depending on the person and the nature of the substance.

This fact sheet is relevant to you if you have spent time in the hospital for withdrawal from one of the following substances:

- alcohol
- GHB
- benzodiazepines (Valium, Rivotril, Xanax...)
- barbiturates

What to do if I have a seizure?

There's not much to do if you have a seizure, but as soon as you regain consciousness, go to a doctor at once.

Warn your family and friends that you could have a seizure. If it happens when they're with you, they should move out of the way any objects that could harm you while you're moving. They should try to stay calm to observe the scene and report what happened to the doctor.

What activities are dangerous?

For people at risk for seizures, the following activities are very dangerous because there is a significant risk of injury. You must absolutely avoid them. Feel free to ask for a work stoppage if your job involves one of these activities:

- **driving a motor vehicle**
- using machinery
- using power tools or compressed air tools
- working at heights
- swimming without a life jacket



Can I still drive a motor vehicle?

- > **If you have had withdrawal seizures:**
 - Don't drive at all during the first 15 days after you stop using the substance.
 - If your doctor has prescribed benzodiazepines: wait at least one week after you stop taking them before you drive again.



- > **If you have never had withdrawal seizures:**
 - If your doctor has prescribed benzodiazepines: wait at least one week after you stop taking them before you drive again.
- > **If you had seizures while you were in the hospital:**
 - Follow your doctor's recommendations about driving.
- > **If you have a seizure after being discharged from the hospital**
 - See a doctor before driving again.
- > **If your doctor has prescribed benzodiazepines for the long term:**
 - Follow your doctor's recommendations about driving.

The above instructions are about driving, but they apply to all risky activities listed on page 1.



ATTENTION

Be careful, if you have ever had seizures while using:

- cocaine
- amphetamines
- PCP

You can only drive if you no longer take these substances (abstinence) and if you are not taking benzodiazepines prescribed by your doctor. The risk of seizures remains high.

Are there any other risks besides accidents due to seizures?

Accidents are still the only serious risk related to seizures, because of the harm you could do not only to yourself but also to others.

Who can I contact for help or to ask questions?

You can contact the Inpatient Addiction Medicine Unit.

> 514 890-8316



USEFUL RESOURCES

Other health sheets published by the CHUM are available. Ask for those that might fit your situation.



You can also find them on our web site chumontreal.qc.ca/fiches-sante

The content of this document in no way replaces the recommendations and diagnoses made, or the treatment suggested by your health professional.

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