

# WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT TAPERING OFF DRUGS

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While using a prescription or illicit drug, you may reach a point where it begins to take over your life. You're not taking it as recreation anymore, or even to treat a medical issue.

Instead, you continue to use just to feel normal or to stave off uncomfortable withdrawal symptoms.

You may have even tried to quit once or twice, but withdrawal and powerful cravings send you back to the drug.

Tapering off a psychoactive substance is often a viable way to limit discomfort while gaining your freedom from active addiction. Plus, weaning off certain drugs can help you avoid potentially dangerous side effects. Before you quit cold turkey, it's important to learn about safe detoxification, tapering, and what you should do next. The best way to start is to speak to a professional. If you are taking a prescription, your doctor should know how to taper off the medication safely.

If you are starting to develop a chemical dependence to a prescription, your doctor may be able to switch your medication to help you avoid long-lasting consequences. Learn more about how to taper off drugs and detox safely.



## WHY WEAN?

If you are fed up with active addiction and chemical dependence, you may be inclined to just quit cold turkey and put it behind you. In some cases, this may be a viable option, but quitting cold turkey on your own can range from extremely uncomfortable to dangerous.

When you become chemically dependent on a psychoactive substance, your brain will have adapted to the drug's chemical effects. Your brain chemistry will be changed in a way that includes your drug of choice. If you stop taking the drug suddenly, your brain chemistry will become unbalanced, causing uncomfortable symptoms. Each major category of drugs can affect the brain differently and subsequently cause different withdrawal effects.



Stimulants affect dopamine and other chemicals that are tied to reward and motivation. Withdrawal symptoms are typically related to mood and psychological side effects like depression and anxiety.

Opioids affect the pain management system throughout the whole body, so withdrawal will also affect the whole body. People typically compare opioid withdrawal to a particularly bad flu.

Depressants like alcohol are among the worst during withdrawal. They suppress the central nervous system, which causes the brain to produce more stimulating chemicals to counteract the drug. When you stop using them, your nervous system goes into overdrive in the form of overstimulation.

In some cases, this stimulation causes seizures, extreme confusion, and a disorder called delirium tremens (DTs), which can be fatal without medical help.

Depressant withdrawal usually requires a medical detox to treat safely, but medical help can also help with other kinds of drugs. Opioids can lead to potentially dangerous dehydration because of side effects like sweating, diarrhea, and vomiting. Even stimulant withdrawal can lead to deep depression and thoughts of suicide.

When you stop using a drug, your brain and body will need time to readjust to normal brain chemistry. Weaning off a substance can help your brain gradually adapt instead of all at once.

In some cases, medical detox programs can help you through withdrawal symptoms without weaning just by treating symptoms and giving your body time to rest and recuperate.

In other cases, weaning is the safest option.

## CAN YOU TAPER OFF DRUGS AT HOME?

Tapering is often a safe way to stop using a drug without experiencing dangerous withdrawal symptoms. But is it possible to taper off at home on your own? It sounds simple, but you might encounter a few issues while weaning off a drug at home. If you are dependent on an illicit drug, using illicit drugs to taper off is difficult. Tapering requires carefully measured doses and exact timelines. If a dose is too large, you won't allow your brain to adapt effectively. If a dose is too small, you might start to experience uncomfortable or dangerous symptoms.

Illicit drugs such as heroin are unpredictable in their strength and content. Heroin might be cut with sugars, starch, or other inert substances that are used to stretch profits. However, they also weaken the potency of it. While you may encounter weak heroin one time, the next batch could be stronger.

With no regulation or standardization, there's no way to ensure the strength of each dose. Heroin could also contain additives like fentanyl, an extremely potent opioid that can lead to fatal overdoses in small amounts.



Fentanyl has been found in other drugs like cocaine and even in pressed pills. If you have developed an addiction to your prescription medication, your doctor may give the proper tapering off doses for you to take at home. However, if you're addicted to prescription drugs that you acquired illegally, tapering off without speaking to a doctor can be risky.

It's difficult to know the right dose to taper with without medical training. A doctor can also help you to manage symptoms that occur during the process.

## HOW TO DETOX SAFELY

The safest way to get through drug withdrawal is to consult with a medical professional or go through a medical detox program. Medical detox involves 24-hour medically managed care for between five and 10 days.

When you first enter a program, medical professionals will determine if you need to go through a tapering period. If so, medical staff will prescribe medications to help wean you off the drug.

In many cases, these prescriptions will not be the exact drug you were taking. Instead, they will be replaced with a more manageable drug of the same class. For instance, doctors may use an opioid like buprenorphine to help wean you off heroin.

Buprenorphine is only a partial opioid agonist, which means it only partially activates opioid receptors in the brain whereas heroin fully activates those same receptors.

Likewise, alcohol is tapered with weak benzodiazepines, which are prescription central nervous system depressants. It's important to note that tapering can take longer than detox would typically last. In some cases, like in [medication-assisted treatment](#), it can take as long as several months to a year. Your doctor might determine that detoxing without a tapering period would be better. Detox may not be enough to facilitate long-lasting freedom from active addiction. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), detox is only the first step in addiction treatment. After detox, you may still experience psychological symptoms and powerful drug cravings. Clinicians can help connect you to the next level of care that's appropriate for your needs. Through the course of addiction treatment, you can address underlying issues like mental health problems. You will also learn relapse prevention strategies that will help you safeguard your sobriety in the future.

## SEEKING ADDICTION DETOX HELP

If you have decided that it's time to stop using a drug you have become dependent on, detoxing the right way is vital for your health and safety. To learn more about safe medical detox and addiction treatment, you can speak to an [addiction treatment](#) specialist at Serenity at Summit. Call 844-432-0416 at any time to hear about the therapy options that are available to you. Addiction may be a chronic disease that's difficult to overcome, but with effective help at your side and the best treatment for your needs, you can become free of active addiction.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Joseph is a writer for Serenity at Summit and has dedicated his career to creating well-researched content so that those that are in search of treatment can find the help they need.

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## SOURCES

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