

Delirium Tremens

Information and advice for patients

Alcohol Care Team

What is Delirium Tremens?

Whilst in hospital you were treated for a condition called delirium tremens.

Delirium tremens, sometimes abbreviated as "DT", is a severe and life threatening form of alcohol withdrawal.

It can occur when people who are drinking large amounts of alcohol every day for a long period of time and who are physically dependent to alcohol suddenly stop or quickly reduce the amount of alcohol they were drinking.

This sudden reduction produce symptoms including:

- Confusion which can make it difficult to make wise decisions
- Severe tremors (Shakes)
- Seizures (Fits)
- Restlessness
- Aggression or irritability
- Sweating
- Hallucinations (seeing or hearing things that aren't real)

Delirium tremens is rare but it is a medical emergency and if untreated, 20% of people can die of this condition.

There are also additional risks whilst you are being treated for DT in hospital, including injury from falls, poor nutrition and development of infections and pressure ulcers.

Why did I get delirium tremens?

It takes a long time to build up a physical dependency to alcohol, therefore it is likely you were drinking large amounts every day for many months and suddenly stopped or reduced this amount.

What treatment was I given?

You will have been monitored very closely whilst in hospital for symptoms of withdrawal and given:

- A medication called diazepam, which is a benzodiazepine and helps calm your nervous system reducing symptoms
- Intravenous fluids with vitamins and minerals to treat dehydration and boost your levels of vitamin

What next?

It is likely you will not remember what happened to you whilst you had DT and you may learn of events from health care professionals, family or friends who visited you whilst you were in hospital which can be upsetting. Now your DT is resolved it is important to remember:

- You are fully detoxed from alcohol, so will no longer be physically dependent. This means you will not get physical withdrawal symptoms if you don't drink alcohol so do not need to drink alcohol for any reason. If you do return to drinking, do not reduce or stop drinking without professional support as you are at risk of DT again.
- Even though you are not physically dependent to alcohol anymore, you may still have problems with the psychological side of addiction such as struggling to cope with your emotions or managing urges but help is available to you, and the alcohol care team will talk to you about this.
- It is important to continue to take your thiamine tablets as these prevent vitamin deficiencies.

You will be offered a follow up appointment with a member of the alcohol care team.

Appointment: Phone call / face to face (circle)

Date:

Time:

Location:

Appointment with:

The Alcohol Care Team can be contacted: 0121 507 5074

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