

Alcohol use, especially for those who drink heavily or those with alcohol use disorder (AUD), can increase the likelihood of alcohol withdrawal syndrome (AWS).

Alcohol is the most commonly used substance in the US.

10.5% (29.5 million) of people ages ≥12 years in the US meet the criteria for an AUD¹

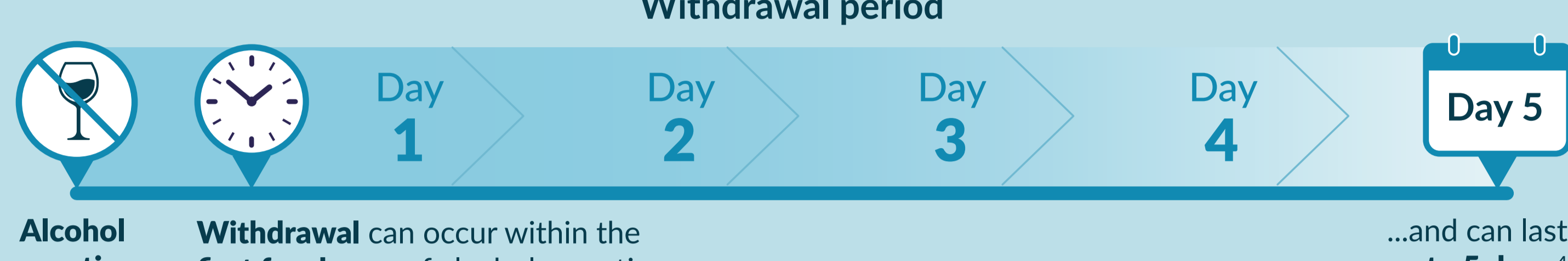
Alcohol use increases the risk for injuries and adverse health effects such as certain types of cancers, heart, and liver disease.²

7.6%

of people with a past-year AUD diagnosis received any treatment and even fewer received MAUD¹

AWS is a condition that can occur after an individual who has been heavily or constantly consuming alcohol suddenly stops or significantly reduces their alcohol consumption.³

Withdrawal period



The symptoms of AWS vary depending on the severity³:

Mild alcohol withdrawal

- Sweating
- Anxiety or irritability
- Headache

Moderate alcohol withdrawal

- Hallucinations
- Seizures
- High blood pressure

Severe alcohol withdrawal

- Seizures
- Delirium tremens, which includes:
 - High heart rate
 - High blood pressure
 - Significant confusion
 - Disorientation



Pregnant individuals may be at risk for **complications** of pregnancy if alcohol withdrawal is not promptly and effectively treated.



Severe alcohol withdrawal can be **life-threatening** if left untreated. **Without appropriate treatment**, delirium tremens has an anticipated **mortality** of up to **37%**.⁴ Therefore, medical intervention and appropriate management are essential.

Severe alcohol withdrawal occurs in ~5% of individuals experiencing AWS.³

Peers can play a crucial role in supporting an individual at risk of or experiencing alcohol withdrawal.

Peer support is nonclinical support based on shared experiences of addiction and recovery.⁵ It enhances engagement and efficacy in the treatment of AUD, improving health outcomes.⁶ Peers also involve loved ones and community resources, further enhancing outcomes.



For individuals with AUD, peer support has been shown to increase⁶:

- Treatment retention
- Recovery outcomes
- Confidence
- Self-esteem
- Coping skills
- Hope

Key roles peers can play in supporting an individual at risk of or experiencing withdrawal

MONITORING & TREATMENT SUPPORT

If an individual is at risk of withdrawal or experiencing withdrawal, peers can:

- Watch for symptoms of withdrawal
- Determine when medical care may be necessary
- Connect individuals to healthcare resources
- Advocate with medical and treatment teams
- Navigate power dynamics and reduce barriers
- Streamline communication between patients and healthcare professionals

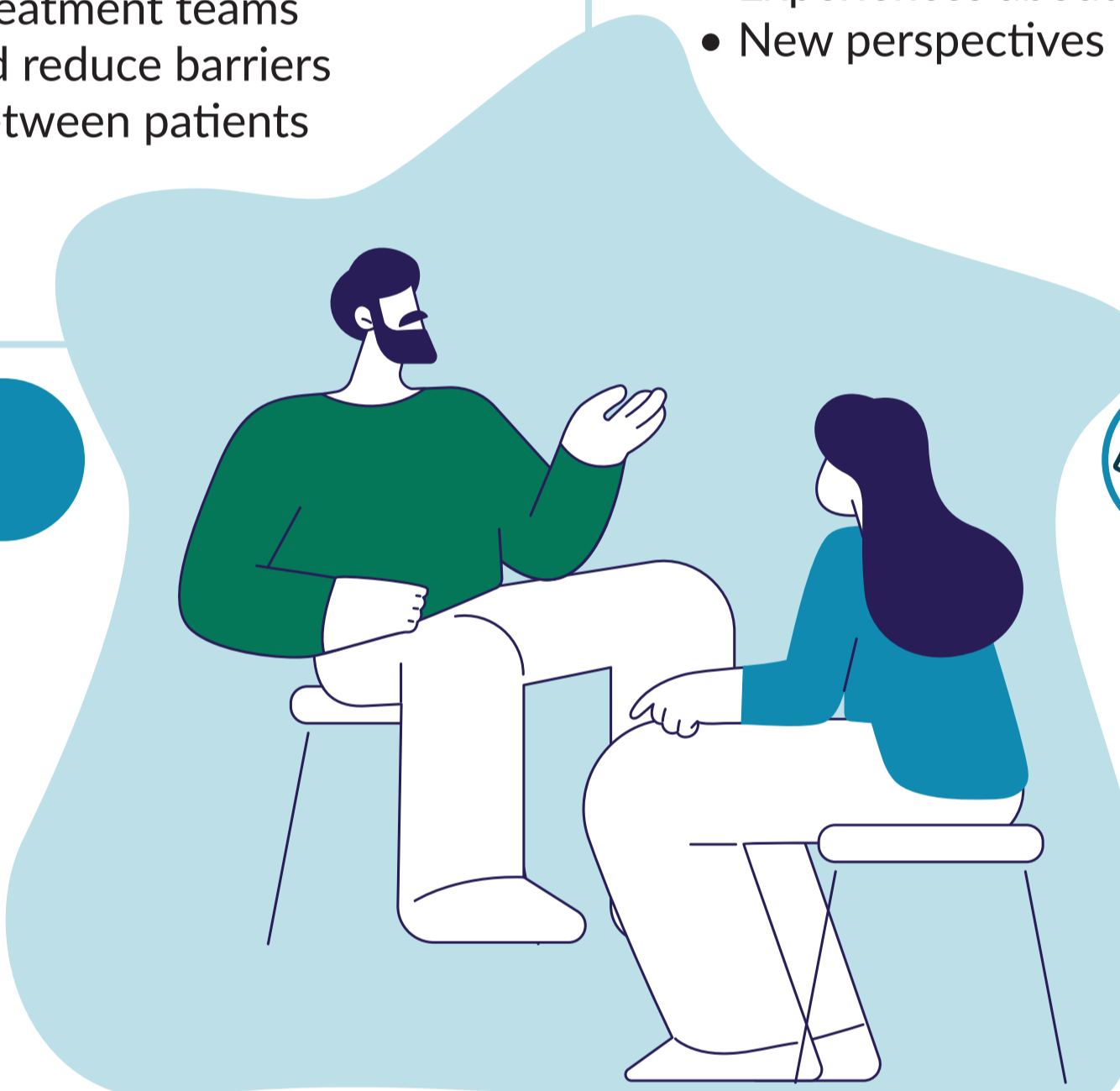
EDUCATION

For individuals at risk, peers can offer:

- Knowledge
- Information
- Resources
- Experiences about AWS
- New perspectives

Following alcohol withdrawal, peers can educate the individual about:

- Treatment
- Recovery services
- Importance of building recovery capital



ENHANCING MOTIVATION

Peers can create a positive relationship with individuals with AUD through:

- Motivational interviewing
- Supportive interactions
- Fostering a sense of hope, support, and mutuality

This can enhance individuals motivation to seek:

- Medical care
- Addiction treatment
- Additional recovery support

CONNECTION

Peers can connect individuals to the appropriate level of care for:

- Withdrawal management
- AUD treatment

Peers can provide acceptance, understanding, and companionship while helping individuals navigate:

- Healthcare
- Employment
- Housing
- Other community services

REDUCE STIGMA

Peers can help reduce stigma by:

- Sharing personal experiences to decrease feelings of isolation and shame
- Promoting medical care to manage withdrawal and AUD treatment (including the use of medications to treat AUD)
- Encouraging more individuals to pursue treatment and support broader community recovery efforts
- Empowering individuals to self-advocate and take the lead in their recovery journey (building self-efficacy and allowing for a patient-centered approach to care)

The goal of treating AWS is to reduce symptoms, prevent complications, and facilitate ongoing treatment for AUD.



Mild or moderate alcohol withdrawal

A licensed prescriber can prescribe **short-term medications** to relieve symptoms.

Severe alcohol withdrawal

May need to be treated in a **withdrawal management (detox) program or hospital**.³ This allows for greater oversight and management of symptoms to reduce the risk of complications.

More than 50% of individuals with a history of AUD exhibit symptoms of AWS if decreasing or discontinuing their alcohol use.⁴

Those most at risk of AWS include individuals who³:



Consume 4+ drinks daily for 4 or more weeks



Have a pattern of binge drinking (4+ drinks in 1 sitting) more than 3 times a week



Have recent symptoms of alcohol withdrawal

Summary

The likelihood of AWS increases with heavy alcohol use. AWS can vary in severity and even be life-threatening if left untreated. The goal of treating AWS is to reduce symptoms, prevent complications and facilitate ongoing treatment for AUD. Peers can play a crucial role in supporting an individual experiencing AWS through monitoring, education, enhancing motivation, connection and reducing stigma.

Learn more at www.pcass-maud.org

References

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