

1 They Just Don't Pay Attention: Recognizing PAWS Symptoms

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2 Objectives

- › Verbalize the symptoms of Post Acute Withdrawal
- › Discuss PAWS symptoms management
- › Demonstrate an understanding of how unrecognized PAWS can lead to relapse

3 Two Stages of Withdrawal

- › The first stage: The acute stage
 - which usually lasts a few day to a few weeks, depending on the drug
 - › Psychological and Physical withdrawal symptoms
 - ›
 - ›
 - ›

4 **5 How long is Acute Withdrawal?****6 The second stage:****Post Acute Withdrawal Syndrome - What is it?**

- › Biopsychosocial syndrome:
 - results from combination of damage to nervous system cause by A&D use and psychosocial stress of coping with life alcohol and drug free
- › Post – after
- › Acute – immediate or severe and short term
- › Post Acute Withdrawal – symptoms that occur after acute withdrawal
- › Group of symptoms of addiction that occur as result of abstinence
- › Appear 7 to 14 days after stopping use or stabilization from acute withdrawal
- ›
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7 Why Does PAWS Happen?**8 Does everyone experience PAWS?****9 PAWS and Stress**

- › Recovery is a major stressor
- › Stress aggravates brain dysfunction = worsening of symptoms
- › Severity of PAWS depends on 2 things
 - Severity of brain dysfunction resulting from addiction
 - › depends on amount of and duration of use
 - Amount of psychosocial stress experienced in recovery
- ›

10 Does PAWS go away?

- › Nervous system damage usually takes 6 to 24 months to heal

- › Symptoms usually peak in intensity over 3 to 6 months
- › Damage in brain usually reversible
- › Major symptoms usually go away in time
- › Can live normal, sober life by learning coping skills
- › Those with consistent long-term recovery learn to recognize and manage symptoms

11 **When do symptoms occur?**

- › Not the same for everyone
- › Vary in severity, frequency, duration
- › May get better (regenerative)
- › May get worse (degenerative)
- › May stay the same (stable)
- › May come and go (intermittent)
- › Some occur at regular moon cycles (without stressors)
- ›

12 **Occurrence of symptoms (cont)**

- › 30, 60, 90, 120, 180 days and 1&2 year sobriety dates may trigger symptoms to increase
- › Persons in recovery from long-term opioid and stimulant use may experience symptoms for no reason for up to 10 years
- › Sometimes symptoms come and go without apparent cause, without specific patterns
- ›

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If you understand what the symptoms are, you are in a position to manage them.

14 **Symptoms of PAWS**

- 1 › Inability to think clearly
 - › Difficulty concentrating
 - › Memory problems
 - › Sleep disturbance
 - › Physical coordination problems
 - › Stress sensitivity
 - › Emotional instability
 - Emotional overreaction
 - Emotional numbness
 - › Cravings/obsessing about drugs
- 2 › Impaired interpersonal skills/social isolation
 - › Difficulty experiencing pleasure
 - › Anhedonia/Depression/suicidal thoughts
 - › Difficulty getting motivated
 - › Feeling guilty
 - › Increase sensitivity to pain
 - › Generalized anxiety/panic disorder
 - › Fatigue/excessive energy

15 **Difficulty thinking clearly**

- › Symptoms
- › Concentration problems
- › Abstract thinking problems
- › Circular thinking
- › Suggestions
 - › Limit the amount of time you spend on any one task to no more than 15 minutes.
 - › Increase the time only when you are consistently successful.
 - › Give yourself permission to be a concrete thinker for this period.
 - › Interrupt the circular thinking cycle by doing something very different (e.g. talk to a friend, listen to music, workout).

16 **Memory problems**

- › Symptom
- › Short-term memory—most common
- › Suggestions
 - › Give yourself permission to sometimes not be able to remember things for even 15 minutes.
 - › Tell your trusted friends about your memory problem, letting them know it is a PAWS symptom.
 - ›

17 **Emotional overreaction or numbness**

- › Symptoms
- › Reaction disproportionate to event
- › Emotional numbness if emotionally overloaded
- › Unpredictable mood swings
- › Suggestions
 - › Discuss your possible overreaction with as many of those with whom you live and work, explaining that it is a symptom of post-acute withdrawal syndrome.
 - › Negotiate with those friends to be able to talk with you about your reaction when it seems to be disproportionate.
 - › Recognize that frequent mood swings are a symptom of PAWS.
 - › Negotiate with trusted friends, giving them permission to talk with you about your mood swings and provide reality checks.
 - ›

18 **Sleep disturbances**

- › Symptoms
- › Nightmares/terrors
- › Difficulty falling asleep, staying asleep
- › Changes in sleep patterns
- › Suggestions
 - › Acknowledge sleep problems as a symptom of PAWS.
 - › Trust that "this too shall pass."

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19 Physical coordination problems

- > Symptoms
- > Dizziness
- > Balance problems
- > Sluggish reflexes
- > Impaired eye-hand coordination
- > Suggestions
 - > Identify, as best you can, under what circumstances these symptoms occur and what has triggered them.
 - > Avoid high risk situations when you are experiencing these symptoms (e.g. operating a motor vehicle).
 - > Tell your family and co-workers about your symptoms so that they don't think you have relapsed.
 - >

20 Stress sensitivity

- > Symptoms
- > Difficulty managing stress
- > All other PAWS symptoms can increase during times of high stress, making managing stress more difficult
- > Suggestions
 - > Get to know your stress triggers and your stress threshold.
 - > Do all you can to minimize your stress triggers.
 - > Let trusted friends, family members, counselors, and your sponsor know about your stress triggers.
 - > Be prepared to experience an increase in other PAWS symptoms if you are under high stress.

Adapted from Bob Carty LCSW, CADC, CCJP

21 Managing Symptoms

- > Learn stress management skills
- > Identify source of stress
 - Identify/avoid triggers
 - Develop decision-making skills
 - Develop problem solving skills
 - Journaling
- > Proper diet
 - 3 balanced meals a day, 3 nutritious snacks, cut out sugar and caffeine
- > Exercise
 - Rebuilding the body, using natural brain "tranquilizers" to relieve pain, anxiety, tension
- > Regular living habits/routines – living in balance, stay active
- > Positive attitudes
- > Spiritual connectedness
 - something bigger, greater, more powerful than self
- > Learning relaxation techniques

- Reduce/escape stress – laughing, playing, music, reading, massage, deep relaxation, visualization, meditation, yoga

22 **Learning to interrupt symptoms before they worsen**

- › Verbalization – talk about it
- › Ventilation – get it out, express thoughts and feelings
- › Reality Testing – ask someone if making sense, behaving correctly: (Is my perception based in reality?)
- › Problem Solving and Goal Setting – choose to take action that can make a change
- › Backtracking – replay an episode (How did it start? What could be done differently to stop?) What made a difference in other PAWS episodes? What worked, what didn't work?

23 **What helps?**

- › Education on
 - Disease of addiction
 - Recovery
 - PAWS
 - Normalizing symptoms
 - Symptoms management skills
- › Retrain ability to remember, concentrate, think clearly
 - Practice skills in safe environment
- › Take things one step at a time, one thing at a time
- › Write things down
- › Taking responsibility to protect recovery

24 **Unrecognized PAWS can lead to relapse**

- › Can go for weeks without any withdrawal symptoms, one day wake up and it will hit like a ton of bricks.
- › Slept badly.
- › In a bad mood.
- › Energy is low.
- › If unprepared for it, or think it only lasts for a few months, or think "I'll be different and it won't be as bad for me", might get caught off guard.
- › Know what to expect!
- › Being able to relax will help with post-acute withdrawal.
- › When a person is tense there is a tendency to dwell on symptoms and make them worse.
- › When relaxed it's easier to not get caught up in the symptoms.
- › Which means one isn't as triggered by symptoms which means less likely to relapse.
- › Remember, every relapse, no matter how small undoes the gains the brain has made during recovery. Without abstinence everything will fall apart. With abstinence everything is possible.
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