



York Teaching Hospital  
NHS Foundation Trust

# Alcohol Related Seizures

Information for patients, relatives and carers

① For more information, please contact:

## **Substance Misuse Liaison Service**

York Hospital

Tel: 01904 726559

Email: [substancemisuseliasionservice@york.nhs.uk](mailto:substancemisuseliasionservice@york.nhs.uk)

ED Alcohol Link Workers: Scarborough Hospital

Tel: 07968 693286

| <b>Contents</b>                                    | <b>Page</b> |
|--|-------------|
| Introduction .....                                 | 3           |
| What is a seizure? .....                           | 3           |
| How is the cause of my seizure diagnosed? .....    | 4           |
| What tests will I need? .....                      | 4           |
| What is an alcohol related seizure? .....          | 4           |
| Alcohol induced seizures .....                     | 5           |
| Alcohol withdrawal seizures .....                  | 5           |
| Other causes .....                                 | 6           |
| York Hospital .....                                | 7           |
| Scarborough Hospital .....                         | 7           |
| What happens when I am discharged home? .....      | 8           |
| How to reduce your daily drinking safely .....     | 9           |
| First Aid advice .....                             | 11          |
| Drink diary and unit tracker .....                 | 13          |
| Driving .....                                      | 14          |
| Where can I get more help? .....                   | 15-17       |
| Tell us what you think of this leaflet .....       | 18          |
| Teaching, training and research .....              | 18          |
| Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) .....    | 18          |
| Leaflets in alternative languages or formats ..... | 20          |

# **Introduction**

This leaflet will provide you with information about alcohol related seizures (fits) and safety advice, which you may find helpful, when discharged from hospital.

## **What is a seizure?**

A seizure (or fit) is a short event that can affect consciousness and cause a convulsion. Some are caused by epilepsy, high fever, a low blood sugar or lack of oxygen, but others can be alcohol related.

A typical alcohol related seizure can cause you to fall to the ground and shake violently for a short amount of time (usually less than five minutes). This is known as a tonic-clonic seizure.

Some people may hurt themselves by banging their heads or limbs, biting tongues or become incontinent of urine whilst having a seizure.

Many people are confused and agitated following a seizure but soon regain full consciousness.

## **How is the cause of my seizure diagnosed?**

Causes of seizures vary and your doctor will need a clear description of your seizure to try to make a diagnosis, although often, no clear diagnosis can be made.

You will be asked what you can remember leading up to and about the event and it is vital that any witnesses also describe what happened. You will also be asked about how much alcohol you drink and when you last had an alcoholic drink before the seizure.

You will need to inform your doctor if this has ever happened before.

## **What tests will I need?**

Whilst in hospital you may have some blood tests and other investigations such as a chest x-ray and a heart tracing (ECG). You may also have a brain scan (CT or MRI scan).

## **What is an alcohol related seizure?**

When someone consumes a lot of alcohol, or when someone whose body is used to having alcohol regularly, suddenly stops or changes their drinking, the brain may react and trigger a seizure.

## **Alcohol induced seizures**

You do not have to be dependent on alcohol to experience an alcohol-induced seizure. Some people may have seizures when they consume a large quantity of alcohol within a short period of time (binge drinking).

## **Alcohol withdrawal seizures**

Regularly drinking a lot of alcohol can cause physical dependence. This means that alcohol withdrawal symptoms may develop if alcohol is suddenly stopped or reduced. Alcohol withdrawal symptoms can occur within six to 12 hours after the last alcoholic drink and are at their most severe 48 - 72 hours after the last drink.

These symptoms include:

- Tremor
- Sweating
- Anxiety/ irritability
- Feeling sick or vomiting
- Sleep disturbances
- Headache
- Confusion
- Marked tremor
- Hallucinations
- Seizures (fits)

Alcohol withdrawal seizures usually occur within 24-48 hours of stopping or suddenly reducing drinking. People who have had an alcohol withdrawal seizure in the past are more likely to have another seizure in the future if they suddenly change their drinking pattern.

It can be dangerous to stop drinking suddenly, so to avoid the dangers of severe withdrawal symptoms we strongly recommend seeking medical advice before stopping drinking.

If you are attempting to do this yourself reduce your drinking gradually over the course of several weeks

## **Other causes**

Alcohol related seizures can be caused when alcohol is mixed with illicit or prescription drugs, including antibiotics.

Head trauma from falls and accidents can also cause seizures; these injuries may be linked to excessive alcohol consumption.

Alcohol may induce seizures in epileptics or those with underlying seizure disorders.

Most people stop drinking without requiring medication, but if you have had a seizure or have severe alcohol withdrawal symptoms, you may be given medication to help with alcohol withdrawal symptoms and reduce the risk of further seizures.

## **York Hospital**

A nurse from the Substance Misuse Liaison Service or the Liaison Mental Health Team may come to see you and /or be involved in planning your treatment. These are a team of specialist nurses who have experience and knowledge of looking after the physical, emotional and social needs of hospital patients with alcohol problems.

You will be able to think about what you want to do about your drinking when discharged home and will be offered specialist community support if you want to stop or change your drinking.

## **Scarborough Hospital**

Whilst you are in hospital an alcohol link worker may come to you to discuss your drinking if identified as drinking above the government's lower risk guidelines. You may be thinking about changing your alcohol use and we can give you time to talk this through and to think about what changes you want to make. We can offer support and help to reduce your drinking and offer referral to specialist community treatment services.

# **What happens when I am discharged home?**

Some people decide that they want to stop drinking alcohol after being in hospital. If you want to stop drinking, community alcohol services are available to help and support you, details are included at the end of this leaflet.

If you have mild or no alcohol withdrawal symptoms when you go home you may be able to stop drinking immediately. If you choose to do this we suggest you see your GP and contact your local alcohol service for support as soon as possible. If you develop symptoms of alcohol withdrawal which you find difficult to cope with you should seek urgent medical advice.

If you still have significant alcohol withdrawal symptoms when you go home and/or have had seizures before you may need to restart drinking alcohol and reduce slowly over several weeks.

Rarely, you may be offered medication to take home from hospital to use for several days whilst your symptoms of alcohol withdrawal get better. People who go home with this medication (usually called chlordiazepoxide) require regular follow up with specialist community services.

Your doctor or nurse in hospital will discuss this with you before you are discharged. If you have any additional questions please ask.

No seizure medication (for epilepsy) will usually be prescribed unless the seizures continue when alcohol issues have been resolved and alcohol is no longer being consumed.

## **How to reduce your daily drinking safely**

Below are some tips on how to reduce your alcohol intake safely and gradually:

- **Remember you are drinking to control withdrawal symptoms, not to get intoxicated.**
- It is important not to cut down so quickly that you end up getting severe withdrawal symptoms, but also not so slowly so that you never stop!

- Once you have worked out how many units a day you drink, try to reduce by no more than 10% of your total units every four days, particularly if you are drinking more than 25 units per day.
- If you start to experience withdrawal symptoms, this means you are cutting down too rapidly. Stabilise for one week and then cut down by 10% each week.
- You may find it is the drinks in the middle of the day which are easier to cut back to start with, so keep your early and late “doses” stable in the start of detox
- If you experience disturbed or disrupted sleep due to withdrawal symptoms, you could try a double dose before bed.
- As you reduce your daily alcohol intake, your withdrawal symptoms should become less severe.
- Keeping a daily record of your symptoms may help you keep track of your progress and give you a guide of how much to reduce the next week. There is an example of a diary and unit tracker on page 13.

# First Aid advice

You and your family and friends may be concerned about what to do if you have another seizure. Some things that can help are to:

- ✓ Loosen any tight clothing around your neck.
- ✓ Put a cushion or clothing under your head to protect you.
- ✓ Move any hard or sharp objects from around you to stop you getting injured.
- ✓ Move you to safety if you are in a dangerous situation (road, fire, water).

Things **not** to do:

- ✗ Try to restrain you or hold you still.
- ✗ Put anything in your mouth or between your teeth.
- ✗ Try to move you unless you are in danger.

Once the seizure has stopped, they should check that your breathing has returned to normal, if not they may need to check there is nothing blocking your airway such as false teeth, food or vomit. They should then put you in the recovery position:



They should not give you anything to drink until you are fully recovered. They should then seek urgent medical attention by coming to the Emergency Department or dialling 999.

# Drink diary and unit tracker

| Day   | Type of drink | Number of drinks | Units | Total units for day |
|---|---------------|------------------|-------|---------------------|
| <b>Example</b>  |               |                  |       |                     |
| <b>Monday</b>   |               |                  |       |                     |
| <b>Tuesday</b>  |               |                  |       |                     |
| <b>Wednesday</b>  |               |                  |       |                     |
| <b>Thursday</b>   |               |                  |       |                     |
| <b>Friday</b>   |               |                  |       |                     |
| <b>Saturday</b>   |               |                  |       |                     |
| <b>Sunday</b>   |               |                  |       |                     |
| <b>If you do find you are over the recommended limits</b><br>(Both men and women should not regularly drink more than 14 units per week spread over three or more days) <b>you may want to start cutting back</b> |               | <b>Total</b>     |       |                     |

# Driving

All applicants and licence holders have a legal responsibility to inform the Driver and Vehicle Licencing Authority (DVLA) of any injury or illness that would have a likely impact on safe driving ability. Alcohol and drugs have an influence on the brain and **will** affect driving performance, therefore can seriously affect your ability to drive. It is **your responsibility** to inform the DVLA if you have problematic alcohol or drug use.

The DVLA will then make a decision on your fitness to drive and may request medical information.

## **DVLA contact details:**

Tel: 0300 790 6806

<https://www.gov.uk/contact-the-dvla>

Address: Drivers' Medical Enquiries, DVLA, Swansea, SA99 1TU

## Where can I get more help?

**Drinkline:** 0300 1231110

A free and confidential helpline for people concerned about their own or someone else's drinking.

Available: Monday- Friday 9am-8pm or Saturday to Sunday 11am-4pm.

**Changing Lives:** 01904 464680

3 Blossom Street

York

YO24 1AU

<https://www.changing-lives.org.uk/>

Integrated community drug and alcohol treatment and support.

**Changing Lives (Oaktrees):** 01904 621776

<https://www.changing-lives.org.uk/>

Bowes Morrell House

111, Walmgate, York, YO1 9UA

A non-residential, abstinence based structured day programme for York.

**North Yorkshire Horizons:** 01723 330730

<https://www.nyhorizons.org.uk/>

Free call 08000 14 14 80

Operates from five main Hubs across the county:

Harrogate - 7 North park Road, HG1 5PD

Northallerton - 5 The Applegarth, DL7 8LZ

Selby - 4 Park Street, Selby YO8 4PW

Scarborough - 56-60 Castle Road, YO11 1XE

Skipton - Mill Bridge House, 4A Mill Bridge, BD23 1NJ

Integrated community drug and alcohol treatment and support for adults and young people in North Yorkshire.

**East Riding Partnership:**

<https://www.humber.nhs.uk/services/east-riding-partnership.htm>

Operates from three hubs covering the East Riding geographical area and provides drop-in services for adults and young people:

The Central Hub

7 Baker Street

Hull, HU2 8HP

Tel: 01482 336675

The West Hub

100 Boothferry Road

Goole, DN14 6AE

Tel: 01405 608210

The East Hub  
Becca House  
27 St John's Avenue  
Bridlington, YO16 4ND  
Tel: 01262 458200

**Alcoholics Anonymous:** 0800 9177650  
<https://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk/>  
Regular meetings take place every week in York and throughout North Yorkshire and there is a meeting in York Hospital every Sunday, 11am-12.15pm.

**Al-Anon Family Groups:** 0800 0086811  
<https://www.al-anonuk.org.uk/>  
National help and support for families and friends.

**Narcotics Anonymous:** 0300 9991212  
<https://ukna.org/>  
Regular meetings take place in York and throughout North Yorkshire.

**Talk to Frank:** 0300 1236600  
<https://www.talktofrank.com/>  
A free and confidential 24 hour helpline about drugs

**York Carers Centre**  
<https://www.yorkcarerscentre.co.uk/>  
Substance Misuse Support Group: 01904 715490

Information, advice and support for carers affected by alcohol and substance misuse. Regular monthly meetings are held.

## **Tell us what you think of this leaflet**

We hope that you found this leaflet helpful. If you would like to tell us what you think, please contact:

Substance Misuse Liaison Service,  
The York Hospital, Wigginton Road, York, YO31 8HE,  
telephone 01904 726559 or email  
substancemisuselianservice@york.nhs.uk.

## **Teaching, training and research**

Our Trust is committed to teaching, training and research to support the development of health and healthcare in our community. Healthcare students may observe consultations for this purpose. You can opt out if you do not want students to observe. We may also ask you if you would like to be involved in our research.

## **Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)**

PALS offers impartial advice and assistance to patients, their relatives, friends and carers. We can listen to feedback (positive or negative), answer questions and help resolve any concerns about Trust services.

PALS can be contacted on 01904 726262, or email  
pals@york.nhs.uk.

An answer phone is available out of hours.



# Leaflets in alternative languages or formats

Please telephone or email if you require this information in a different language or format, for example Braille, large print or audio.

如果你要求本資 不同的 或 式提供 , 電  
或發電

Jeżeli niniejsze informacje potrzebne są w innym języku lub formacie, należy zadzwonić lub wysłać wiadomość e-mail

Bu bilgileri değişik bir lisanda ya da formatta istiyorsanız lütfen telefon ediniz ya da e-posta gönderiniz

Telephone: 01904 725566

Email: [access@york.nhs.uk](mailto:access@york.nhs.uk)

|                    |                                  |
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