Opioid Withdrawal

Opioid withdrawal happens when someone physically dependent on opioids reduces or stops use. The nervous system, suppressed while opioids were present, rebounds in the opposite direction: pain, anxiety, sweating, vomiting, insomnia.

It's rarely life-threatening in otherwise healthy adults, but it carries real risks. Severe dehydration from vomiting and diarrhea, cardiovascular stress, and a sharply increased overdose risk on relapse make unsupervised withdrawal dangerous.

Most people who try to detox alone don't complete it. Medical detox gives the process a fair chance to work, and what happens after detox is what determines whether it sticks.

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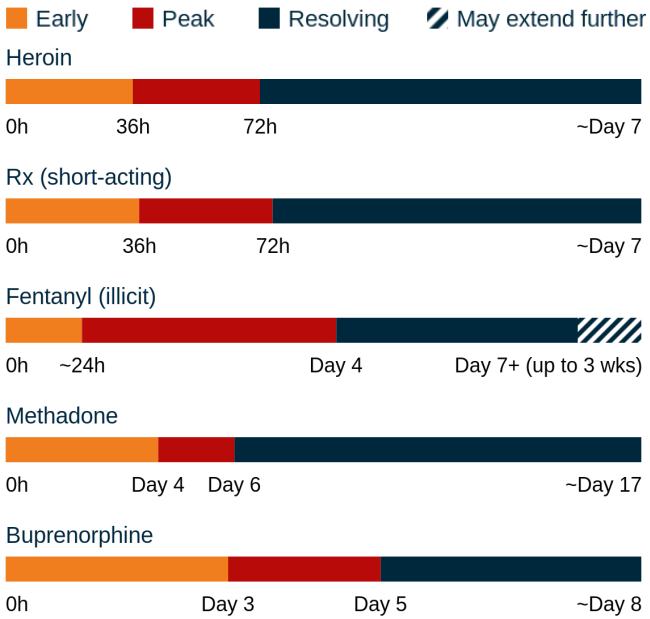
What withdrawal looks like

Early Symptoms

- Anxiety, restlessness, irritability, insomnia
- Muscle aches and joint pain
- Sweating, chills, elevated heart rate
- Runny nose, watering eyes, yawning
- Strong drug cravings

Peak Symptoms

- Muscle cramps, involuntary leg movements
- Nausea, vomiting, diarrhea
- Goosebumps, dilated pupils, light sensitivity
- Elevated blood pressure, rapid breathing
- Intense psychological cravings



Withdrawal doesn't follow a fixed schedule. The timelines above show typical patterns, but your experience may start sooner, peak harder, or take longer to resolve. Dose, length of use, and individual physiology all play a role.

What to do

1. **Talk to a doctor before you stop.** Even if you're not ready for full detox, a clinician can help you plan, manage symptoms, and connect you to care.

2. **Don't quit cold turkey.** Completion rates for unsupervised withdrawal are low, and the failures are dangerous.

3. **Ask about medically supervised detox.** It's the supervised alternative to quitting on your own. Trained staff monit or for complications and use medications to manage symptoms as they come up:
   - Withdrawal severity and cravings
   - Sweating, anxiety, and muscle aches
   - Nausea, diarrhea, and insomnia

4. **Plan for what comes after.** Completing detox is the starting point, not the finish. Structured treatment, support, and addressing the psychological side are what determine long-term outcomes.

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