

Withdrawal from Pain Medicines in Children

What is withdrawal and why does it happen?

When a child receives certain medicines for a long time, the body gets used to having them. This is called physical dependence. When these medicines are stopped quickly, the body needs to adjust to this change. This is called withdrawal.

Symptoms of Withdrawal

There are many common symptoms. When your child withdraws, you may see some or all of these symptoms. Keep in mind, not all people will withdraw from medicines.

- Poor sleep patterns
- Tremors
- Fever
- Agitation
- Irritable or trouble calming child
- Diarrhea
- Vomiting or retching
- Stomach pain
- Poor feeding
- Itching
- Sweating
- Yawning
- Sneezing
- Goose bumps
- Higher heart rate
- Higher blood pressure
- Stiff arms or legs
- Arching of back

What can be done to prevent withdrawal?

When your child’s health care team decides to stop certain medicines, the doses will be decreased slowly. This is called weaning. During this time, some symptoms may be seen but should not be harmful. As a parent it may be hard to watch your child withdraw from the medicine. The team and family need to decide if the child can handle these symptoms. The weaning can be stopped or slowed. Sometimes another medicine is given to lessen symptoms. This will give your child’s body time to adjust to the change.

Medicines may also be given to prevent withdrawal. We cannot always get rid of all the withdrawal symptoms. Every patient is unique and reacts in a different way. The goal is to create a balance. We hope to quickly and safely wean your child off medicines that are no longer needed and avoid side effects, and limit symptoms.

What can be done to help my child?

Your child’s nurse will watch for any signs or symptoms. You can also let your child’s nurse know if you see any signs so medicine can be given, if needed.

There are also other things you can do to help your child. A quiet room, dim lighting, quiet, calm music, a calm lap, slow rocking, reading a book, or gentle massage can help.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person’s health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 1/2020. University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing, HF#6646