Post Acute Withdrawal Syndrome (PAWS)

Recovery from using alcohol and drugs can cause many signs. These signs often occur as the body attempts to repair the brain and other organs. These signs are called Post Acute Withdrawal Syndrome (PAWS) and are common for most recovering alcoholics or addicts. Signs of PAWS are often seen 7 to 14 days after stopping alcohol or drug use. They peak over the next 3 to 6 months. Learn the signs of PAWS and how to manage them.

Common signs of PAWS

- **Coordination problems.** Dizziness, trouble with balance, problems with hand and eye coordination, and slow reflexes can cause you to be clumsy and accident prone.

- **Stress sensitivity.** You may have trouble identifying low or high stress situations. You may not recognize a low level of stress but then you explode when you start to feel more stress. People often feel this is one of the more confusing signs to deal with in recovery.

- **Not able to think clearly.** You may have trouble with problem solving and concentration. You may struggle with facts and figures. You may read something over and over and still not understand what the text is trying to say. Your thinking may change, so you are not able to see options or the same thoughts may go around and around in your head.

- **Memory problems.** You may be forgetful and not remember recent events.

- **Emotions are active or numb.** You may become angry over a small matter, feel more anxious, or are more excited than you have reason to be. It is easy to lose control and do something rash or impulsive. If you become too overwhelmed, you may shut down your emotions so that you are numb and not able to feel anything. Many people have mood swings that change quickly.

- **Sleep problems.** You may have trouble falling asleep, staying asleep, or waking up early. You may have changes in your sleep patterns, such as sleeping for long periods of time, going for days without feeling a need for sleep, or sleeping at different times of the day.

Cycles of signs

Signs of PAWS often become worse during times of high stress. When you are well rested and relaxed, eating properly and getting along with people, you will probably appear to be fine. Your thoughts will be clear, your memory seems fine, and your emotions will fit the situation.

When you have high stress, your brain may suddenly shut down and causing signs to worsen.

Signs of PAWS often occur at regular “moon cycle” intervals and without apparent outside stressors. This is often around days 30, 60, 90, 120 and 180, and around the one and two year marks of sobriety.
People recovering from long term opiate use, such as pain killers and heroin, or stimulant use, such as cocaine and amphetamines, often have signs of PAWS for no apparent reason for several years.

Expect your body to need at least a year to return to normal physically. You may need at least two years for your emotions and thinking to return to normal.

We will work with you in an ongoing program of growth and recovery to help you.