



# Alcohol Detox Virtual Acute Care Unit

This leaflet is for patients who are discharged home following a stay in hospital with alcohol withdrawal. It explains how we continue to monitor you at home to make sure your withdrawal symptoms are well controlled and you remain safe..

**VACU telephone: 0118 322 5201 (8am-8pm, Mon-Sun)**

**Out of hours: 111 or 999**



## What is the Alcohol Detox Virtual Acute Care Unit?

The purpose of our Virtual Acute Care Unit is to monitor you while allowing you to stay in the comfort of your own home. Stopping alcohol after drinking regularly can give you withdrawal symptoms. You have been started on medications for your withdrawal symptoms and have been assessed as stable enough to complete your detox at home. Before you are discharged from hospital, we will show you how to video call us from your smart phone / device.

**It is very important that you DO NOT DRINK ANY ALCOHOL during your detox. If you do drink alcohol, please inform the VACU staff **AS SOON AS POSSIBLE**.**

## What will happen after I go home?

**Once you return home, a member of the VACU team will video call you:**

- To assess your symptoms and advise you on how much medication to take to control them.
- We will monitor you for tremor (shaking hands), sweats, hallucinations (seeing things that are not real), orientation to time, place and person and mood (calm, anxious or panicked mood).
- We are also able to prescribe you more medications to treat your withdrawal, if needed.
- We may ask you to use a breathalyser on the call.
- If you have not heard from us by 1pm on the first day after arriving home, call the Virtual Acute Care Unit number (0118 322 5201) 8am-8pm Monday-Sunday. You can also call this number if you have any questions or concerns.

**We will video call you twice a day until your symptoms have been resolved.**

## About your medication

During detox you may suffer from mood swings, sleeplessness, forgetfulness, poor co-ordination and feel anxious and irritable. The medication you have been prescribed should help to reduce symptoms.

- **Chlordiazepoxide:** For the first couple of days, the dosage is very high and then it gradually decreases until you are no longer taking any. The drug acts as a substitute for the alcohol

you have been taking and the idea is to gradually wean your body off the drug, so that the withdrawal is controlled and comfortable.

- **Thiamine:** You may also have been prescribed some Vitamin B Complex (Thiamine). This protects your brain and your memory functions from harm during the detoxification.
- You may also be sent home with a **breathalyser**.

Make sure you are able to attend all appointments and that you **take all medications according to the instructions you have been given**.

## Alarm signs and what to do next

**Seek help via 111 or 999 in the following cases:**

- If you have episodes of **blackouts or faints**.
- If you have a **seizure (fit)** – this is an event where you suddenly lose consciousness and fall onto the floor; you may shake during this episode as well.
- If you have **persistent vomiting** and are struggling to keep your medications down.

During working hours, you can also call our Virtual Acute Care Unit number if you are not sure.

## First aid for seizures (fit): advice for people witnessing a seizure

**Please go through this section with the person you live with / your carer and have it easily accessible as it gives important advice for use during a seizure.**

**Call 999 for an ambulance.** It might be scary to witness, but do not panic.

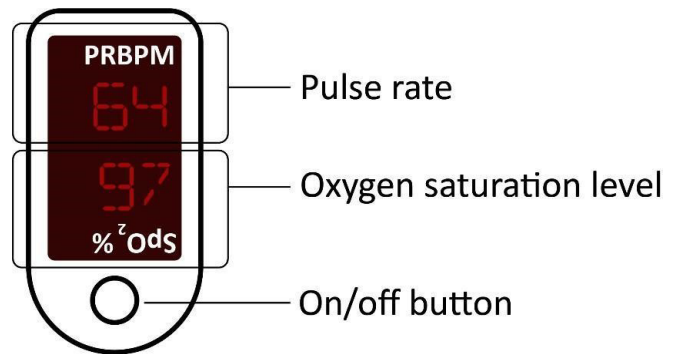
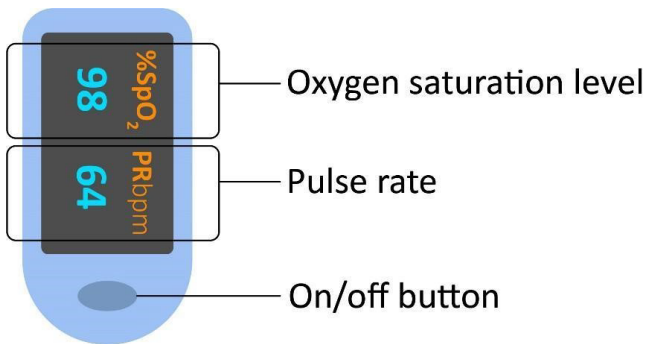
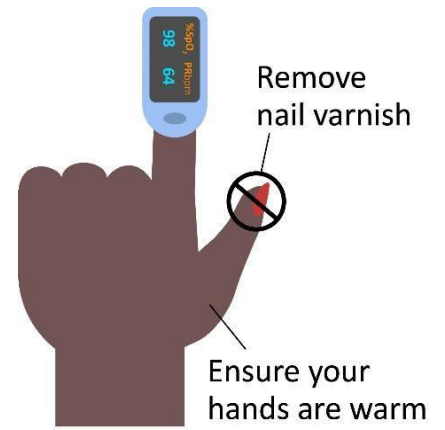
- Only move them if they are in danger, such as near a busy road or hot cooker.
- Cushion their head if they are on the ground.
- Loosen any tight clothing around their neck, such as a collar or tie.
- Turn them on to their side after their fit stopped.
- Stay with them and talk to them calmly until they recover.
- Note the time the seizure starts and finishes.
- Do not put anything in their mouth, including your fingers. They should not have any food or drink until they have fully recovered.

**If you have any questions or concerns, do not hesitate to call our Virtual Acute Care Unit number – we are happy to help as we know this can be very stressful and scary.**

**0118 322 5201**

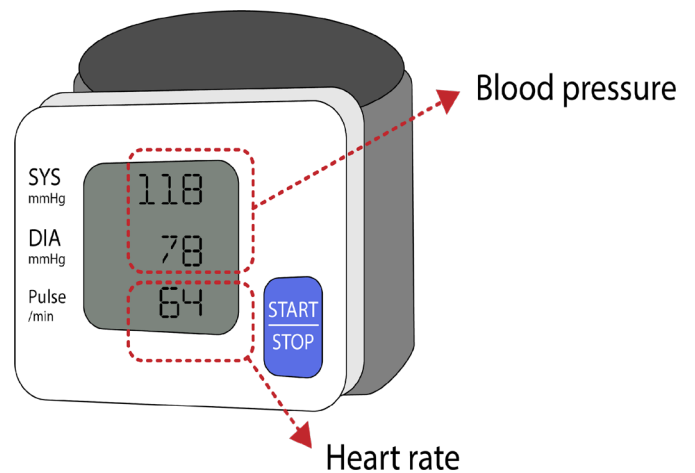
### Instructions for using your pulse oximeter at home

- Make sure your fingers are warm.
- Remove any nail varnish before attaching the probe.
- Clip the oximeter onto your finger.
- Sit up straight and rest for a few minutes before taking measurements.
- After 5–10 seconds, the probe will give you two different numbers – an oxygen saturation level (abbreviated to SpO2) and a pulse rate (abbreviated to PR or BPM) – we are interested in both readings.



### Using your blood pressure monitor at home

- Ensure you are seated comfortably and rest for a few minutes before taking the readings.
- Attach the cuff to your wrist, against your skin (and not over clothing).
- Press the START/STOP button to start measuring your blood pressure – the cuff will pump up, which may feel a bit uncomfortable for a short period.
- The monitor will give you three readings.
- The top two readings are your blood pressure.
- The bottom number is your heart rate.



## Recording your oxygen levels, heart rate, temperature, and blood pressure

Using the table below, record your oxygen saturations level, your pulse rate, your temperature and your blood pressure four times a day:

DATE								
Morning	Oxygen							
	Heart rate							
	Blood pressure							
	Temperature							
Midday	Oxygen							
	Heart rate							
	Blood pressure							
	Temperature							
Afternoon	Oxygen							
	Heart rate							
	Blood pressure							
	Temperature							
Evening	Oxygen							
	Heart rate							
	Blood pressure							
	Temperature							

## Recording your symptoms

We also advise you to record your symptoms yourself four times a day – in the morning, the afternoon, the evening, and before going to bed. You can also record your symptoms at night if you cannot sleep.

Date and time	Tremor 'Shaking'			Sweating			Hallucinations 'seeing things that are not real'			Orientation to time, person and place			Mood		
	None	On movement	At rest	None	Moist	Drenching	None	Know they are not real	Unable to tell apart hallucinations from reality	Orientated	Unsure	Not orientated	Calm	Anxious	Panicked

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## Additional advice

Try to relax and avoid stress. This is a time for quiet walks and easy distractions, like watching television. Many people find they cannot concentrate on things like reading, but this is a temporary reaction, and nothing to worry about.

- **Diet:** Your appetite may be poor during detox but it is still worth trying to eat a little, as small frequent healthy meals will help minimise craving for alcohol:
  - Stock up some light, easily digestible foods, such as biscuits, as well as healthy foods such as fresh fruit and vegetables, cereals, wholemeal bread, fish and lean meat.
  - You will probably become dehydrated during detoxification, so ensure you are drinking plenty of water or soft drinks.
- **Safety:** Take precautions during this time:
  - Plan to take at least one week off work and do not drive during this time.
  - You must take care when performing certain tasks such as cooking and boiling water.
- **Support:** Most people undergoing detox find that they need plenty of support from the people around them – especially when they are craving a drink. A competent person should stay with you full time for the first 5-7 days until otherwise agreed.

During the detox and in the early stages of recovery, you will be quite vulnerable, so avoid situations where alcohol is consumed or openly available, and before the detoxification starts, remove all the alcohol from your home. If anyone else in your home also drinks, ask them if they will be prepared to stop drinking during the detox programme.

After the detox, you will remain vulnerable especially in the first few days and weeks, so make sure your 'after detox plan' is clear and definite. You may also want to consider additional support services such as [Change Grow Live](#) and [Alcoholics Anonymous](#).

## Information for friends or family of patients detoxifying from alcohol

- **Adjusting:** If your relative or friend has been drinking for a long time, it will take them and their body some time to adjust to being sober. During this time, the drinker is likely to be restless, irritable, moody, anxious and depressed, and they may suffer from insomnia (difficulty sleeping) and possibly be quite difficult to live with for the next few days and weeks.
- **Medication:** The medication (chlordiazepoxide) that the drinker has been prescribed should help to reduce these withdrawal symptoms. For the first couple of days, the dosage is very high, and then it gradually decreases and stops. This is because the drug is a substitute for the alcohol they have been taking, and the idea is to gradually wean them off the drug so that the withdrawal is gradual, controlled and comfortable.

They have also been prescribed some Vitamin B1 (Thiamine), which is important to protect their brain and memory functions from harm during the detox. Please ensure they take both medications according to the instructions given.

**It is very important that the drinker takes all the medication prescribed as instructed.** It will help to protect the brain and mental functions and preserve memory.

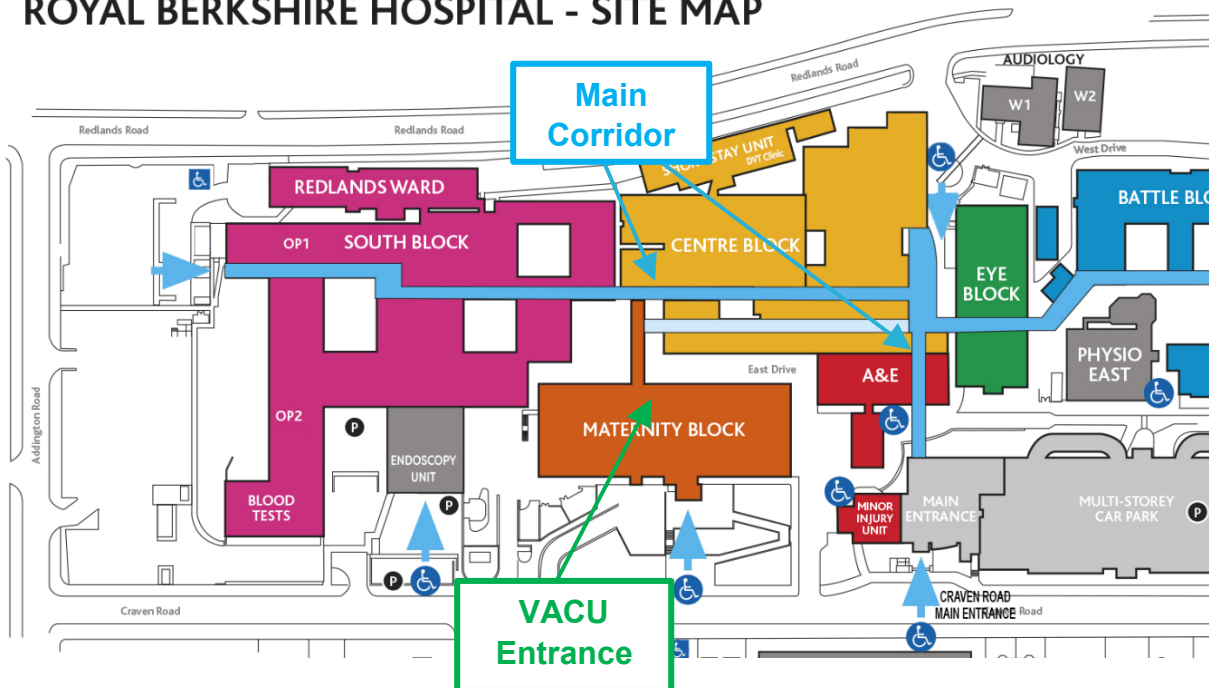
- **Be careful** during this period of time. The medication can make them feel very drowsy and detached from reality. It will slow their reaction times and may affect their judgement. **They should not drive a car or operate dangerous machinery until after the treatment is finished.** They should take time off work to recover and will need support caring for any children.

- **Diet:** Practically, it can help if you can arrange for them to have a high quality diet. Of course, they must not drink any alcohol, and **it is a good idea to remove all alcohol from the house**. At first, they may not have much appetite but this should improve. Fresh fruit and vegetables, juices and water, wholegrain cereals, wholemeal bread, fish and lean meat are recommended. High quality diets like this have been shown to help people get better quicker and to reduce their craving for alcohol. The person can drink tea and coffee, but moderation is advised, as too much caffeine can increase sleeplessness and irritability.
- **Safety:** Although the detox process is usually very safe, it is important that you know what to do if a problem arises. Minor symptoms causing a little discomfort are to be expected and tolerated. However, any of the following is a cause for concern and should be taken seriously:
  - Confusion
  - Hallucinations (hearing or seeing things that are not there)
  - Fitting**If you identify any of these symptoms, it is important to contact the Virtual Acute Care Unit immediately for advice or 111 out of hours. If the drinker starts fitting, call 999 and ask for ambulance service.**

## Returning the devices

Once you have recovered, please return the pulse oximeter to the drop-off box located in the Virtual Acute Care Unit (VACU) in **Maternity Block, level 2** – see map below. Open Mon-Sun, 8am-8pm. **Please do not return them to the Emergency Department (A&E).**

## ROYAL BERKSHIRE HOSPITAL - SITE MAP



To find out more about our Trust visit [www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk](http://www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk)

**Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.**

RBFT Virtual Acute Care Unit

Reviewed: September 2024. Next review due: September 2026.