

Dear Peggy:

Having a family member “in recovery” I am hearing all kinds of new terms. What are “DTs” and “blackouts”?

DTs or delirium tremens are “the shakes” that alcoholics have when their drinking has been interrupted. DTs are a detox symptom that occurs when the alcoholic has gone long enough without drinking for the withdrawal symptoms to occur. When the alcoholic also experiences hallucinations in combination with “the shakes”, it is called DTs. The DTs are very dangerous and anyone who experiences them should seek medical attention immediately.

“Blackouts”, which begin in the early stage of alcoholism, involve a loss of memory while drinking. Many people mistake “blackouts” for passing out. People who have been drinking, may not recall later what they did while drinking, including walking around, engaging in conversation, or doing other tasks. A blackout does not have involve something as dramatic as waking up in a motel room in another town with a Kentucky Fried chicken leg in your mouth, and not remembering how you got there. It can involve not recalling a conversation that you had with someone, not knowing how you got home, not recalling where you left your car, wallet (or some article of clothing), not knowing where your money went or that you bought rounds for “the house”.

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