

Withdrawal is life without the medication of your lost relationship. You are coming down from the sedation of security to face reality. Symptoms of withdrawal are intense. Many ... survivors are prepared to bargain, petition, beg, manipulate, do anything to get their loved one to come back. During this stage you are like the addict desperate for the love fix you can't get. What are these intense feelings of yearning, agonizing, and craving about?

Relationships are, in fact, mediated by the brain's own opioid system. Most people are familiar with the opiate drugs, narcotics like morphine, heroin, and opium. Our brains produce their own morphinelike substances, including endorphin. Both narcotics and the brain's own natural opiates help to block pain.

According to researcher Jaak Panksepp, when you build a close relationship, your brain produces more opioids. Conversely, when a relationship ends, the production of certain opioids decreases, and your body goes through physical withdrawal. Biochemically speaking, then, your closest relationships are a form of endorphin addiction. What you feel during abandonment withdrawal—the craving, yearning, waiting, and wanting of your lost loved one—is psychobiologically akin to withdrawal from heroin or morphine. The difference is that when you are in love withdrawal, you associate your symptoms with your emotional loss rather than with a narcotic. In other words, the difference is the context—how you interpret the withdrawal symptoms—not the physical symptoms themselves.

It is difficult to isolate how a single body system is affected, since the body's systems interact to form a complex web. The author (Susan Anderson) tried to do so with the brain's opioid system (separation distress has been found to lead to a reduction in the opioids, and to symptoms of withdrawal akin to heroin withdrawal) and with the stress hormones (which effect appetite, sleep, and other states of alertness and action-readiness).

But in fact, stress hormones influence many other functions as well, including the immune system, the growth process, aging, memory, energy levels, and moods. Sustained arousal of the body's fight-or-flight response is associated with anxiety. Increased levels of glucocorticoid and CRF stress hormones are found in people diagnosed with depression. Hormonal, neurotransmitter, opioid, and other biochemical levels usually return to baseline as you progress through the stages of recovery.

In the meantime, you are left to contend with your body's sustained state of arousal, along with the practical challenges you face. It is no small wonder that you are temporarily washed out, stressed out, miserable, and depressed. During withdrawal, you are fighting an enormous aggressive mental battle, exerting as much energy as if you were actually wrestling with a powerful enemy.

AKERU RECOVERY FROM WITHDRAWAL LEARNING TO Go WITH THE ENERGY OF WITHDRAWAL

“I had a constant pulling in my gut, this aching for Gabby, said Keaton. “I suppose if I was still drinking, I would’ve tried to medicate it with alcohol, just to calm down. But I needed to find a less destructive way to put out this torch.”

The withdrawal stage is driven by attachment energy, the impulse to bond. Just because the object of your attachment is no longer available to you does not mean that your need to bond goes away. On the contrary, it pulls with all of its might to regain what it has lost.

During withdrawal, you feel the potency of this instinct most keenly because it is being thwarted. In fact, at no time is this force more apparent than when you are in acute love withdrawal. As painful as it may be, you need this pull. It provides the impetus for your recovery, once you learn to redirect it. When your need for attachment is being satisfied—when it has found an object—it blends once again into the background of your emotional awareness. Its energy is working for you, but you can no longer hear the hum of its engine. When this energy is thwarted, the urgency will not abate until it finds something else attach to, until it reinvests itself elsewhere.

We are always searching for an ideal partner who will meet our greatest needs. This search brings us to the second Akeru exercise, which is designed to help you find that ideal someone. To begin with, that someone is you. Forming a significant relationship with yourself helps you take another step in the direction of self-reliance and serves as the basis for a new level of connectedness to others. Remember that one of akeru’s meanings refers to the empty space created when someone has left. This empty space creates pain, to be sure, but when you know how to direct its energy, it becomes a reservoir of new life. Your task is to use the attachment energy to address your innermost needs—the feelings rising out of your abandonment wounds old and new. No one expects you to do this by osmosis. The process involves a hands-on exercise that, by steady increments, creates a vehicle for emotional healing. The technique is easy. The results are remarkable.

Excerpted from:

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The Journey from  
Abandonment  
to Healing

Susan Anderson, C.S.W.

  
BERKELEY BOOKS, NEW YORK

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