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Supporting Brain-Body Healing in the First Phase of Recovery

Cognitive Challenges in Early Recovery

QUICK TIPS FOR CLINICIANS

Anxiety

- Hyperarousal and anxiety are common features of acute withdrawal
- Normalize the anxiety as predictable and temporary effect of substance withdrawal
- Teach grounding techniques to combat the fight-or-flight response

Sleep Disruption

- Insomnia, nightmares, and fragmented sleep are common in early withdrawal
- If applicable, rule out non-substance use causes of insomnia (e.g., sleep apnea, chronic pain, medication side effects)
- Avoid recommending sleep medication unless absolutely necessary due to risk of cross-addiction

Cognitive Challenges

- Clients in early recovery may describe cognitive fog, disorientation, or up-and-down concentration
- Explain that difficulty concentrating or thinking is a temporary result of recovery, not a sign of permanent cognitive damage
- Keep instructions brief and simple since memory and focus might lag.