

Medication Options for Alcohol Use Disorder

There are 3 FDA approved medications for the treatment of Alcohol Use Disorder:

1. **Naltrexone** (oral and injection)
2. **Acamprosate** (oral)
3. **Disulfiram** (oral)

1. Naltrexone (Vivitrol)

Naltrexone works by blocking opioid receptors that block the effects and feelings of alcohol. Naltrexone reduces alcohol cravings and reduces the rewarding feeling of alcohol. Naltrexone is not habit-forming.

Research shows that naltrexone:

- decreases alcohol cravings and desire to drink alcohol.
- decreases the amount that people drink.
- helps people maintain sobriety for longer.

Dose: 1 tablet (50 mg) by mouth once daily, or Vivitrol injection once a month.

Side Effects: Most people do not have side effects. Some people can have nausea, vomiting, or liver toxicity.

Caution: Avoid naltrexone if you have very abnormally high liver tests. You cannot take naltrexone if you are also taking opioids because naltrexone can cause precipitated opioid withdrawal if taken within 5-10 days of opioid use.

2. Acamprosate (Campral)

Acamprosate binds to receptors related to GABA and glutamate, which are involved in alcohol use.

Acamprosate decreases alcohol cravings and help people stop drinking. It also decreases the negative symptoms following alcohol withdrawal. Acamprosate is not habit-forming.

Research shows that acamprosate:

- helps people maintain sobriety.
- helps prevent return to drinking.

Dose: 2 tablets (666 mg) by mouth three times daily

Side Effects: Most people do not have side effects. Some people can have diarrhea, headache, insomnia, or anxiety.

Caution: Avoid acamprosate if you have abnormal kidney function.

3. Disulfiram (Antabuse)

Disulfiram works to prevent people from drinking alcohol by causing a severe reaction to drinking even a small amount of alcohol, specifically nausea, vomiting, flushing, and racing heartbeat. This is not usually the first treatment option but can be used if you are very committed to taking disulfiram every day or if you take it with supervision.

Dose: 1-2 tablets (250- 500 mg) by mouth once daily

Side Effects: Disulfiram will cause an uncomfortable physical reaction including nausea, vomiting, flushing, and heart palpitations if used with alcohol. Side effects when not used with alcohol are rare.

Caution: Avoid disulfiram if you have heart or liver problems.

For more information on treatment and medications, talk with your IMPACT team. For online resources, refer to SAMHSA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration): www.samhsa.gov