

Medications for the Treatment of Alcohol Use Disorder

How can you reduce the risks associated with drinking alcohol?

Alcohol use disorder can be treated.

A person with an alcohol use disorder can recover and improve their health and wellness. For some, alcohol use disorder can be a **chronic condition**, like heart disease or diabetes, but it can be managed.

Most people with an alcohol use disorder benefit from support to initiate and sustain recovery. Support may come from multiple sources, including treatment through healthcare providers, community-based peer supports, and self-help pathways.

Treatment helps people to:

- Stop drinking
- Get through withdrawal and cope with cravings
- Address issues tied to alcohol use disorder, such as low self-worth, a bad work or home situation
- Begin engaging in a process of change - a way of living known as **recovery**

Medication for Alcohol Use Disorder

Medication is used for people with an alcohol use disorder. Medication can be used in combination with counseling and behavior therapies, to treat alcohol use disorder and sustain recovery. Medication can help to:

- Regain a clearer state of mind
- Provide freedom from thinking about alcohol all the time
- Focus on changes that improve health and wellness

Currently, there are three medications that are recommended for treating alcohol use disorder:

- Acamprosate
- Naltrexone
- Disulfiram

Each medication acts differently. None of these medications will get rid of symptoms of withdrawal. Please see the tables for information on each medication in this brochure.

These medications may be safely taken for years. Plans to stop taking medication should be discussed with a health care provider.

★ **Note:** There is no medication that can guarantee people who have an alcohol use disorder will not return to drinking.

When to consider medications:

- If the constant thoughts of alcohol is making it difficult for you to reduce or stop your alcohol use.
- When recommended by your provider.

Benefits of medications:

When used with counseling, medications can:

- Reduce thinking about alcohol.
- Allow you to concentrate on other important parts of your life, such as jobs, family, and health.

Precaution regarding alcohol withdrawal:

- None of these medications treat alcohol withdrawal.
- Depending your health and alcohol use, your provider may recommend a period of detoxification from alcohol to avoid serious complications of stopping alcohol suddenly, such as delirium tremens (DTs) and seizures.
- This detoxification may happen at home, in a special detoxification center, or in the hospital.
- Please consult with your provider regarding which setting would be safest.

Medication monitoring:

- Some medications for alcohol use disorders require blood work to be done before starting and while you are taking the medication.
- This need depends on your health and which medication is used.

	Acamprosate (Campral)*	Naltrexone (ReVia, Vivitrol)	Disulfiram (Antabuse)
How does it work?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Rebalances chemicals in the brain that become unbalanced due to alcohol use. ● Decreases relapses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Decreases heavy drinking. ● Decreases relapses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Causes unpleasant effects when consumed with alcohol: flushing, headache, nausea, vomiting, sweating.
How do I take it?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● By mouth 3 times a day 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● By mouth daily OR Injection once a month 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● By mouth daily
Potential side effects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Diarrhea ● Nervousness ● Weakness ● Sleep difficulties ● Low mood ● Suicidal thoughts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Nausea/vomiting ● Headache ● Dizziness ● Fatigue ● Liver problems ● CANNOT be taken with opioid pain medicines. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Fatigue ● Headache ● Metallic taste ● Numbness/tingling in hands or feet ● Rash

*Acamprosate (Campral) usage needs to be monitored if you have kidney disease.

Tips to Cut Down on Your Drinking

Monitoring your alcohol use can help you prevent risks to your health and wellness (such as accidents, liver disease, cancers, etc...)

- **Avoid situations and triggers** that may cause you to drink.
- **Record how much you drink** each day.
- **Pace your drinking.** Have no more than **one standard drink*** per hour.
- **Set a daily and weekly drinking limit.** Write down your limit and keep it with you.
- **Ask someone you trust** to help you stay within your limit.
- **Speak with your health care provider** and/or seek treatment for your alcohol use.

* One standard drink



Alcohol Resources



Finding Quality Treatment for Substance Use Disorders

This fact sheet serves as a guide for individuals seeking behavioral health treatment. It provides three necessary steps to complete prior to utilizing a treatment center and the five signs to finding a quality treatment center.

<http://bit.ly/FindingQualityTx>



Faces of Change: Do I Have a Problem With Alcohol or Drugs?

This resource explores the lives of five characters living with different substance use disorder conditions. It illustrates the stages of change and the value of treatment, recovery, and motivational incentives. It also includes a change plan worksheet.

<http://bit.ly/SMA15-4174>



Rethinking Drinking, Alcohol & Your Health

This website discusses the importance of being aware of how much you are drinking and the harm that drinking can cause. It also explains strategies for reducing your consumption and support for quitting.

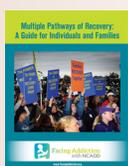
<https://www.rethinkingdrinking.niaaa.nih.gov>



Treatment for Alcohol Problems: Finding and Getting Help

This guide is written for individuals, and their family and friends, who are looking for options to address alcohol problems. It is intended as a resource to understand what treatment choices are available and what to consider when selecting among them.

<https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/brochures-and-fact-sheets/treatment-alcohol-problems-finding-and-getting-help>



Multiple Pathways of Recovery: A Guide for Individuals and Families

This guide has been developed to promote and explore the varied pathways of recovery. While comprehensive, this guide can not possibly contain all avenues to recovery.

<https://files.hria.org/files/SA5826.pdf>