

# Medications for the Treatment of Alcohol Use Disorder

## Resilience

## Reintegration

## Recovery



### How can you reduce the risks associated with alcohol use disorder?

#### Alcohol use disorder can be treated

A person with an alcohol use disorder can recover and regain a healthy life.

Many people with a drinking problem need help returning to a healthier lifestyle. They can get this help from health care providers, including physicians.

#### Treatment helps people to:

- Stop or decrease their drinking
- Get through withdrawal and cope with cravings
- Address issues tied to the alcohol use problems, like co-occurring mental health issues, a bad work or home situation, or spending time with people who encourage alcohol or drug use
- Begin making healthier choices— a way of living referred to as **recovery**

**Addiction-focused medical management** involves a combination of steps which include the treating physician prescribing medication to help with the diagnosed alcohol use disorder. Counseling and behavior therapies may also be used in conjunction with medications to further assist with treatment and to sustain recovery.

Taking medication for alcohol use disorder is like taking medication to treat any other medical condition. It is not substituting one drug for another. Used properly, medication does not create a new addiction.

**Note:** No existing medication can guarantee that problem drinkers will not return to drinking, or relapse.

For individuals with moderate to severe alcohol use disorder, the Department of Veterans Affairs and Department of Defense recommend:

- **Naltrexone**
- **Topiramate**

And suggest using:

- **Acamprosate**
- **Disulfiram**

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

#### Some medication may be safely taken for years

Plans to stop taking medication should be discussed with a health care provider because abruptly stopping medication can cause serious health problems.

#### Medication is matched to you

Meeting with a health care provider is the first step in starting a medication program to reduce or stop drinking alcohol. You and your health care provider can work together to select a medication that is right for you.

#### Talk to your health care provider about:

- Your treatment goals
- Safe withdrawal management, to include the need for medication or a hospital admission
- Medications to help with your long-term recovery
- All medications that you are taking, such as over-the-counter medications, herbal supplements, and even those prescribed by another provider, as they may cause problems or interfere with your recovery
- Future office visits and treatment schedule
- How to avoid situations that might cause you to start drinking again
- A counseling plan and available support groups

**Counseling** can be offered as part of medication-assisted treatment or by itself. It consists of talking with a mental health provider either one-on-one or in a group with others in treatment. Counseling can provide encouragement, motivation to stick with treatment, and coping skills to avoid relapse.

In **group counseling** and peer support groups, people connect with others in treatment and or to help build a new sober social support network.

**Support from family and friends** can be very helpful during treatment and recovery. Some treatment programs offer counseling for loved ones because being close to someone with an addiction can be hard. Counseling is useful for family and friends to learn about:

- Addiction
- How to help
- How to handle other problems



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## Naltrexone (nal-trex'-one) (Revia, Vivitrol)

### Description

- Decreases or completely blocks the enjoyable effects of drinking
- Decreases the number of relapses

### Potential side effects

- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Injection site reaction (hardening, itching or swelling)
- Headache
- Dizziness
- Nervousness
- Feeling tired
- Feeling sleepy
- Decreased appetite
- Yellowness of the skin or eyes\*
- Allergic pneumonia with difficulty breathing, coughing, or wheezing\*
- Suicidal thoughts\*



\* CONTACT YOUR HEALTH CARE PROVIDER IMMEDIATELY IF YOU EXPERIENCE THIS SIDE EFFECT

## Topiramate (toe-pyre'-a-mate) (Trokendi XR, Qudexy XR, Topamax)

### Description

- Decreases craving for alcohol
- Repairs chemical imbalance in systems of the brain responsible for excitation and reward

### Potential side effects

- Abnormal tingling
- Nervousness
- Feeling tired
- Poor coordination
- Sleepiness
- Pain in belly
- Reduced appetite
- Poor memory\*
- Confusion\*
- Slowing of movements\*
- Difficulty with concentration\*
- Difficulty finding exact words\*
- Suicidal thoughts\*



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## Acamprosate (a-kam'-pro-sate) (Campral)

### Description

- Repairs chemical imbalance in systems of the brain responsible for excitation
- Decreases the number of relapses

### Potential side effects

- Diarrhea
- Nervousness
- Weakness
- Difficulty falling or staying asleep
- Depression\*
- Suicidal thoughts\*



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## Disulfiram (dye-sul'-fi-ram) (Antabuse)

### Description

- Causes unpleasant effects when alcohol is consumed:
    - Flushing of the face
    - Throbbing headache
    - Difficulty breathing
    - Nausea
    - Vomiting
    - Sweating
  - Does not decrease alcohol cravings
- Those taking it should avoid alcohol in all forms including mouthwash and over the counter medications*

### Potential side effects

- Sleepiness
- Metallic taste
- Headache
- Yellowness of the skin or eyes\*
- Numbness or tingling in hands and feet\*
- Confusion\*
- Losing contact with reality\*
- Excessive and severe reaction when alcohol is consumed\*



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## WARNING



Let your health care provider know of any allergies or existing health conditions.



Tell your health care provider if you are pregnant, planning on getting pregnant or breastfeeding.



Some patients cannot take certain medications because of health conditions or the medications may not mix well with others.



Tell your health care provider if you experience any side effects.



Avoid driving or other activities where you need to be alert or see clearly until you know your reaction to the medication.



If taking Disulfiram, avoid drinking alcohol, taking other medications that contain alcohol and eating food containing alcohol.