

# Acamprosate for Alcohol Use Disorder

Acamprosate is a medication used to help manage alcohol dependence. It works best for people who would like to stop drinking alcohol fully, not just drink less.

It is not clear exactly how this medication works. It is believed to balance brain chemicals that have been damaged by regular, heavy drinking. It is believed that the discomfort from this imbalance makes some people start drinking again.

Acamprosate may help you drink less.

Acamprosate may also help lower some withdrawal symptoms, like insomnia (not being able to sleep), anxiety, and restlessness.

Like most medications for alcohol use disorder, acamprosate works best when combined with counselling and/or a support group.

## How do I take this medication?

- Acamprosate comes as a tablet and is taken 3 times a day.
- **Do not chew, crush, or split the tablets.** Each tablet has a coating that stops the medication from being absorbed until the tablet passes through your stomach.
- Your prescriber may prescribe acamprosate after you have stopped using alcohol and as soon as your physical withdrawal symptoms have gone down (usually 3 to 5 days). They may prescribe a lower dose (1 tablet, 3 times a day) for the first 3 days to lower your chance of nausea (upset stomach).
- You may need a lower dose if your kidneys do not work well or you weigh less than 60 kg (132 pounds). Talk with your pharmacist or health care provider.

## Does acamprosate interact with other medications?

Acamprosate can be taken with most medications. Be sure to tell your pharmacist if you are taking any other medications.

## What will happen if I drink alcohol while taking acamprosate?

- You do not need to stop taking acamprosate if you drink alcohol.
- **Acamprosate does not:**
  - › lower the effects of alcohol (like impaired coordination and judgment).
  - › affect your blood alcohol level.
  - › change the way your body metabolizes (breaks down) alcohol.

## How long will I need to take acamprosate?

- Acamprosate is usually taken for 3 to 6 months.
- Talk with your prescriber about stopping acamprosate once your alcohol use has stabilized (stays at the same level) and you no longer have strong urges to drink alcohol.
- You do not need to slowly lower your dose of acamprosate over time. You should not have any withdrawal symptoms when you stop taking it.

## What are the possible side effects?

- Most people tolerate (are able to handle) acamprosate well. Side effects are usually mild and get better over time.
- Common side effects include:
  - › Diarrhea (loose, watery poop)
  - › Anxiety
  - › Insomnia
  - › Itchy skin

## How much does acamprosate cost?

- Acamprosate is covered under many drug plans, including Nova Scotia Pharmacare. Some drug plans will make your prescriber fill out special paperwork before covering the cost of the medication. Your pharmacist can help with this.
- Without a drug plan, this medication will cost between **\$100 to \$175 a month**, depending on your dose.

*Prepared by: Pharmacy Services, Aberdeen Hospital  
Designed by: Nova Scotia Health Library Services*

The information in this pamphlet is for informational and educational purposes only.  
The information is not intended to be and does not constitute health care or medical advice.  
If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.