

Disulfiram for Alcohol Use Disorder

- Disulfiram is a medication that helps manage alcohol use disorder. It is prescribed for people who want to stop drinking alcohol fully.

How do I take this medication?

- Disulfiram is taken orally (by mouth) as a capsule.
- **Disulfiram is not available from all pharmacies.** It is only available from pharmacies that are able to make it into a capsule form.
- The usual dose (amount) of disulfiram is 250 mg a day. The maximum (highest) dose you can have is 500 mg a day.

What will happen if I drink alcohol while taking disulfiram?

- Disulfiram blocks the body's usual process for breaking down alcohol. This causes a chemical called **acetaldehyde** to build up in the body. About 10 to 30 minutes after using alcohol, this buildup causes symptoms like:
 - › Sweating
 - › Headache
 - › Dyspnea (trouble breathing)
 - › Flushing (face or skin gets hot and turns red or darker in colour)
 - › Palpitations (fast, irregular heartbeat)
 - › Nausea (feeling sick to your stomach)
 - › Vomiting (throwing up)

How well does disulfiram work?

- Disulfiram works best for people who want to stop using alcohol completely.
- It may help you to stop using alcohol because of the symptoms it causes when you drink alcohol (see above).
- It may not lower your alcohol cravings. Talk with your health care team for more information about managing cravings.
- **Like most medications for alcohol use disorder, disulfiram will work best if you are also going to counselling and/or a support group.**

Do I need to stop taking certain medications or eating certain foods while taking disulfiram?

- **Avoid medications, foods, and products that list alcohol in the ingredients while taking disulfiram.** Common items that may have alcohol include:
 - › Sauces
 - › Vinegars
 - › Cough syrups
 - › Cologne or perfume
 - › Mouthwash

How long will I need to take disulfiram?

- You may need to take disulfiram for months or years. Talk to a member of your health care team about how long you should take this medication.
- **Do not** use medications or eat foods that have alcohol for 14 days (2 weeks) after stopping disulfiram.

What are the possible side effects?

- › Feeling drowsy (sleepy)
- › Fatigue (tiredness)
- › Rash
- › Headache
- › Metallic or garlic-like aftertaste
- Liver toxicity (poisoning) may happen. **This is rare.** Your health care team will check how well your liver is working during your treatment.

This pamphlet is for educational purposes only. It is not intended to replace the advice or professional judgment of a health care provider. The information may not apply to all situations. If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.

Find all patient education resources here:
www.nshealth.ca/patient-education-resources

Connect with a registered nurse in Nova Scotia any time:
Call 811 or visit: <https://811.novascotia.ca>

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