

Naltrexone for Alcohol Use Disorder

Naltrexone is a medication used to help manage alcohol dependence.

This medication works on the reward pathways in the brain by lowering the good feeling you get from drinking alcohol. Naltrexone may help you drink less.

Naltrexone does not treat alcohol withdrawal symptoms, like insomnia (not being able to sleep), anxiety, and restlessness. You may need to be treated for withdrawal symptoms at home or in the hospital before starting this medication.

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

How do I take this medication?

- Naltrexone comes as a 50 mg tablet.
- The usual dose is 1 tablet, once a day in the evening.
- Your prescriber may prescribe 25 mg (half a tablet) once a day for a few days before going up in dose to 50 mg once a day. This will help to lower the risk of side effects.

How well does naltrexone work?

- Naltrexone can help lower your cravings for alcohol and the amount of alcohol you drink. It can help you:
 - › drink less often.
 - › have less drinks when you do drink.
 - › have a longer time before you start drinking again.
 - › have more days of abstinence (not drinking at all).

Does naltrexone interact with other medications?

- Naltrexone is an opioid blocker. This means it can block the effects of medications that have opioids, and can cause withdrawal symptoms from opioids if taken together. It is important to review with your prescriber and pharmacist before you start taking any medications, herbal products, or supplements.

Examples of opioids include:

- › Tylenol® with Codeine No. 1
- › Tylenol® with Codeine No. 2
- › Tylenol® with Codeine No. 3
- › Oxycodone
- › Morphine
- › Hydromorphone
- › Methadone
- › Lomotil®

What will happen if I drink alcohol while taking naltrexone?

- You do not need to stop taking naltrexone if you drink alcohol.
- **Naltrexone 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 naltrexone?

- Naltrexone is usually taken for 3 months.
- You do not need to slowly lower your dose of naltrexone over time. You should not have any withdrawal symptoms when you stop taking it.
- Talk with your prescriber when you feel you are ready to stop taking naltrexone.

What are the possible side effects?

- Most people tolerate (are able to handle) naltrexone well. Side effects usually get better over time.
- Common side effects include:
 - › Nausea (upset stomach)
 - › Vomiting (throwing up)
 - › Headache
 - › Dizziness
 - › Fatigue (feeling tired)
 - › Insomnia
 - › Nervousness
 - › Anxiety
 - › Depression
- Liver toxicity (poisoning) has been reported in rare cases.

How much does naltrexone cost?

Naltrexone is covered under many drug plans, including Nova Scotia Pharmacare. Sometimes drug plans will make your prescriber fill out paperwork before they will cover the cost of the medication. Your pharmacist can help with this. Without a drug plan, this medication costs about **\$100 a month**.

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.