

Medications for Treating Alcohol Dependence

The chart below highlights some of the properties of each medication. It does not provide complete information and is not meant to be a substitute for the package inserts or other drug reference sources used by clinicians. For patient information about these and other drugs, the National Library of Medicine provides Medline Plus (<http://medlineplus.gov>).

Whether or not a medication should be prescribed and in what amount is a matter between individuals and their health care providers. The prescribing information provided here is not a substitute for a provider's judgment in an individual circumstance, and the NIH accepts no liability or responsibility for use of the information with regard to particular patients.

	Disulfiram (Antabuse®)	Naltrexone (ReVia®)	Acamprosate (Campral®)
Action	Inhibits intermediate metabolism of alcohol, causing a build-up of acetaldehyde and a reaction of flushing, sweating, nausea, and tachycardia if a patient drinks alcohol	Blocks opioid receptors, resulting in reduced craving and reduced reward in response to drinking	Affects glutamate and GABA neurotransmitter systems, but its alcohol-related action is unclear
Contraindications	Concomitant use of alcohol or alcohol-containing preparations or metronidazole; coronary artery disease; severe myocardial disease	Currently using opioids or in acute opioid withdrawal; anticipated need for opioid analgesics; acute hepatitis or liver failure	Severe renal impairment (CrCl ≤ 30 mL/min)
Precautions	High impulsivity—likely to drink while using it; psychoses (current or history); diabetes mellitus; epilepsy; hepatic dysfunction; hypothyroidism; renal impairment; rubber contact dermatitis	Other hepatic disease; renal impairment; history of suicide attempts. If opioid analgesia is required, larger doses may be required, and respiratory depression may be deeper and more prolonged.	Moderate renal impairment (dose adjustment for CrCl between 30–50 mL/min); depression or suicidality
Serious adverse reactions	Hepatitis; optic neuritis; peripheral neuropathy; psychotic reactions. Pregnancy Category C.	Will precipitate severe withdrawal if patient is dependent on opioids; hepatotoxicity (uncommon at usual doses). Pregnancy Category C.	Anxiety; depression. Rare events include the following: suicide attempt, acute kidney failure, heart failure, mesenteric arterial occlusion, cardiomyopathy, deep thrombophlebitis, and shock. Pregnancy Category C.
Common side effects	Metallic after-taste; dermatitis	Nausea; abdominal pain; constipation; dizziness; headache; anxiety; fatigue	Diarrhea; flatulence; nausea; abdominal pain; headache; back pain; infection; flu syndrome; chills; somnolence; decreased libido; amnesia; confusion
Examples of drug interactions	Amitriptyline; anticoagulants such as warfarin; diazepam; isoniazid; metronidazole; phenytoin; theophylline; warfarin; any nonprescription drug containing alcohol	Opioid analgesics (blocks action); yohimbine (use with naltrexone increases negative drug effects)	No clinically relevant interactions known
Usual adult dosage	<i>Oral dose:</i> 250 mg daily (range 125 mg to 500 mg) <i>Before prescribing:</i> (1) warn that patient should not take disulfiram for at least 12 hours after drinking and that a disulfiram-alcohol reaction can occur up to 2 weeks after the last dose; and (2) warn about alcohol in the diet (e.g., sauces and vinegars) and in medications and toiletries <i>Followup:</i> Monitor liver function tests periodically	<i>Oral dose:</i> 50 mg daily <i>Before prescribing:</i> Evaluate for possible current opioid use; consider a urine toxicology screen for opioids, including synthetic opioids. Obtain liver function tests. <i>Followup:</i> Monitor liver function tests periodically	<i>Oral dose:</i> 666 mg (two 333-mg tablets) three times daily <i>or</i> , for patients with moderate renal impairment (CrCl 30–50 mL/min), reduce to 333 mg (one tablet) three times daily <i>Before prescribing:</i> Establish abstinence

The information in this chart was drawn primarily from references 18 and 23 (see page 30).