

Medications for alcohol use disorder

Table 1: Medications for AUD

| Medication | Action | Effectiveness | Dosage | Contraindications and side-effects |
|--------------------|--|--|--|--|
| Naltrexone | Blocks opioid receptor and reduces euphoric effects of drinking | NNT = 12 to prevent heavy drinking and NNT = 20 for abstinence* | 25 mg for 3 d (to reduce GI effects) then increase to 50 mg/d to a maximum of 100 mg/d Patients do not need to abstain before starting | Contraindications <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taking opioids • Elevated liver enzymes (> 3 time normal range) • Liver failure (caution with dysfunction or disease) • Pregnancy Side effects <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GI upset • Elevated liver enzymes Monitoring <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Measure liver enzymes at baseline, 4 wk, then every 3 mo • Discontinue naltrexone if levels rise > 3 times baseline |
| Acamprosate | Antagonizes glutamate receptors (excitatory neurotransmitter) | NNT = 12 to achieve abstinence* | 666 mg 3 times daily or 333 mg 3 times daily if there is renal impairment or body weight is <60 kg Patients should abstain for at least 4 d before initiation | Contraindications: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Serious renal disease • Pregnancy Side effects: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GI upset • Nervousness |
| Disulfiram | Blocks conversion of acetaldehyde to acetic acid and causes a buildup of acetaldehyde. Patients experience sweating, palpitations, and | Has positive outcomes when taken with supervision** (by partner, pharmacist or AA sponsor) Compares | 250 mg/d (range 125 mg to 500 mg) Must be abstinent at least 2 d before initiation | Contraindications <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elderly • Cardiac disease • Liver dysfunction, disease, or failure • Psychosis • Cognitive dysfunction • Pregnancy Side effects: |

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| | hypotension. Effects can be severe and in very rare cases, fatal | favourably to naltrexone and acamprosate in head-to-head trials | Disulfiram reaction can occur up to 10 d after stopping medication | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hepatitis • Neuropathy • Depression • Psychosis Monitoring: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Measure liver enzymes at baseline, 2 wk and the every 3 mo • Discontinue if levels rise > 3 times normal range |
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AA—Alcoholics Anonymous, AUD—alcohol use disorder, GI—gastrointestinal, NNT—number needed to treat

*Jonas et al, 2014 **Jorgensen et al, 2011

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