

# Treating alcohol use disorder with medication



Your doctor has talked with you about naltrexone (Revia) or has prescribed it for you. This medication can help treat alcohol use disorder.

## Who is this medication for?

It's for any adult who wishes to:

- stop drinking alcohol
- avoid a relapse (stay sober)
- drink less

## How does it work?

Naltrexone helps prevent relapse. When you take it, you feel less craving for alcohol. This makes it easier to reach your goal.

It's also a good idea to enter into therapy with a health professional specialized in dependence or a psychologist. This can be done alone or in a group (see Useful Resources on page 3).

## When should I start the treatment?

It's best to start the treatment when:

- you've stopped drinking alcohol
- you have no more withdrawal symptoms (e.g., sweating, anxiety, tremors)

## How do I take this medication?

Take one tablet per day. Follow your doctor's instructions about the dosage.



## A holistic approach

Alcohol use disorder can develop for all kinds of reasons. Our environment, our relationships, and our habits can encourage us to drink. As with any chronic health problem, it's important to be assessed holistically and to receive the right support.

## How long does it take to start working?

It may take more than a week. It's advisable to try it for at least 3 months. After that, you and your family doctor will assess together whether it's worth continuing. If it's effective, it can be taken long-term.

## Are there side effects?

Naltrexone doesn't usually cause many side effects. The most common are:

- nausea
- headache
- dizziness

These effects are temporary. If any of them bother you to the point that you're thinking of stopping treatment, talk with your pharmacist or doctor. They will try to find a solution with you.



## What happens if I drink alcohol during treatment?

Drinking alcohol during treatment won't make you sick. You won't have more side effects. If you've been drinking, don't stop your treatment. Naltrexone can also help people drink more moderately.



### CAUTION

Keep in mind that naltrexone:

- doesn't change the level of alcohol in the blood
- doesn't reduce drunkenness and its risks, such as impaired driving

## Could I become dependent on naltrexone?

No. This medication doesn't create any physical or psychological dependence. You won't get "hooked".

## Are there any contraindications?

Yes. Your doctor will decide whether you can take this medicine.

### Talk with your pharmacist or doctor right away if, during treatment:

- you become pregnant, plan to get pregnant, or are breastfeeding
- you are prescribed opioids (such as morphine, hydromorphone, oxycodone or codeine) to relieve pain; naltrexone will neutralize their effect
- you need to undergo surgery; in general, naltrexone should be stopped 1 week before the operation and restarted a few days after you stop taking opioid painkillers

In such cases, your doctor will need to assess whether you should stop naltrexone and find another form of support.



**For your safety, when you consult health professionals, tell them you're taking naltrexone, especially if you need surgery.**

## What if I forget to take a dose?

If you miss a dose, take it as soon as you remember.

## Where should I store the medication?

Store it in a safe place out of the reach of children. Don't store it in the kitchen or the bathroom. The medication is sensitive to heat and humidity.

## What signs should I watch for during treatment?

Consult a health professional if you have:

- vomiting
- skin and whites of eyes turning yellowish
- dark urine
- loss of appetite, stomach pain, and pale stools



A blood test may be done to check the condition of your liver.

## What if I want to stop treatment?

It's not dangerous to stop taking it. This drug is not addictive. However, we advise that you be supported by a health professional specialized in dependence, for example at an addiction rehabilitation centre.

## Who can I ask if I have questions?

Ask your pharmacist or your healthcare team.



## CHUM PATIENT HEALTH LINE

**514 890-8086**

**24 hours a day, 7 days a week**

You're a CHUM patient? You have questions about your health status? A nurse can help you.



## USEFUL RESOURCES

Your neighbourhood Dependence Rehabilitation Center (CRD):  
Call your CLSC and ask for the contact information of the nearest CRD.

Drugs: Help and referral  
Telephone support, addiction information, and other resources.

**1 800 265-2626 (24/7)**

[drogue-aidereference.qc.ca](http://drogue-aidereference.qc.ca)

Alcoholics anonymous:

[aa-quebec.org](http://aa-quebec.org)

Click the Help Line tab to reach them by telephone.

Info-Santé

**8-1-1**

Other health sheets published by the CHUM are available. Ask for those that might fit your situation.



You can also find them on our web site

[chumontreal.qc.ca/fiches-sante](http://chumontreal.qc.ca/fiches-sante)

*The content of this document in no way replaces the recommendations and diagnoses made, or the treatment suggested by your health professional.*

To find out more about the Centre hospitalier de l'Université de Montréal  
[chumontreal.qc.ca](http://chumontreal.qc.ca)



## Questions

Write down any questions you want to ask your care team so you don't forget anything.




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## Observations - Comments

Write down observations you feel are important : your symptoms, treatments, follow-up, energy level, spirit, etc.




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## Resource people and contacts

Write down phone numbers, email addresses and websites that could be useful.




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