

# Treating alcohol dependence with medication



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

## Who is this medication for?

It's for any adult who wishes to:

- stop drinking alcohol
- drink less
- get help to stay sober

## How does it work?

Naltrexone reduces the pleasure related to drinking alcohol. How? Alcohol produces pleasant sensations in the brain, which reinforces the drinking habit. This medication blocks these sensations, making it easier for you 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).

## How do I take this medication?

The medication comes in tablet form. Follow your doctor's instructions about the dosage.



### Dependence is complex

Alcohol dependence can develop for different reasons, such as to reduce feelings of distress or boredom, or because of social pressure. Physical and genetic factors can also come into play. This is why it's better to act on several fronts.

## 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 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

In that case, 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. However, if it's almost time for the next dose, don't take the missed dose. Take only the scheduled dose. **Never take 2 tablets at a time.**

## 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 a good idea to stop it on your own. Consult your family doctor to assess the situation together.

## Who can I ask if I have questions?

Ask your pharmacist or family doctor.



## 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)**

Click EN, top left, for English.

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)**



## Questions


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

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