

Your Guide to Medications for Alcohol Use Treatment

Patient Information

www.interiorhealth.ca

"The medication greatly reduced my alcohol cravings and withdrawal symptoms and helped me get on with the life I want."

These medications can support you to:

- Reduce your cravings
- Reduce the number of days you are drinking
- Reduce how often you are binge drinking
- Reduce the amount of alcohol you are drinking overall

Stopping alcohol suddenly without medical support can be life threatening.

To refill your medications

- Make an appointment with your family doctor or local medical clinic
- Talk to your pharmacist
- Contact your local Mental Health and Substance Use (MHSU) Centre at **310-MHSU (6478)**

The cost of many medications are covered.

Talk to a healthcare professional today or call 310-MHSU (6478). There may be **free or low cost** treatment options in your community including:

- Individual or group counselling
- Withdrawal management (detox)
- Cultural and spiritual care
- Peer support
- Services for pregnant and parenting people

[more information on other side →](#)

Peoples' lived experience with medications for Alcohol Use Disorder



youtu.be/nCC44vcBMA8

Watch Matthew's Experience

"I was really afraid to confront everything that I had used alcohol to bury. I am 43 years old and I am such a different person than I used to be. Here I am, I am alive and happy."

For more success stories, medication information, and resources, visit interiorhealth.ca.



interiorhealth.ca/mhsu

Call 8-1-1

Healthlink BC
www.healthlinkbc.ca

Nurse	24 hours a day	Daily
Dietitian	9 a.m. – 5 p.m.	Mon – Fri
Pharmacist	5 p.m. – 9 a.m.	Daily
Hearing Impaired	Call 7-1-1	

Call 8-1-1 to speak with a nurse, ask a dietitian about nutrition, or a pharmacist about your medication.

Your Guide to Medications (*continued*)

Naltrexone, Topiramate, or Gabapentin

- These medications help with your goal to reduce alcohol use or to help with your goal to quit alcohol (abstain)
- You should notice a slow drop in cravings to drink alcohol
- These medications are taken by mouth, with or without food; make sure to swallow and **do not** chew

Naltrexone

- **Effects** first noticed within 1 hour
- Talk to your care provider as naltrexone can be taken at **different times** of the day to be effective - For example, naltrexone can be taken before going to a social event to reduce cravings and the amount you drink
- ✗ Inform your provider if you are using **opioids** (Tylenol® #3, kadian, dilaudid, fentanyl, etc.) – Naltrexone may no longer be a safe choice in this case
- ✗ Naltrexone is **not safe** to take if you have severe **liver disease (cirrhosis)**

Topiramate

- **Effects** first noticed within a week
- The **dose** for topiramate often increases every week.
- Abruptly stopping this medication can result in severe withdrawal and is not recommended. If you need to stop, work with your care provider to taper off.
- ✗ Topiramate is **not safe** to take if pregnant or planning on becoming **pregnant**

Gabapentin

- **Effects** first noticed within a week
- Abruptly stopping this medication can result in severe withdrawal and is not recommended. If you need to stop, work with your care provider to taper off.
- ✗ Gabapentin use requires caution if you have **renal (kidney) impairment**

Acamprosate

- **Effects** first noticed within a week
- You have been prescribed Acamprosate to help with your goal to quit alcohol, it is less useful if you are still drinking; it works by fighting cravings
- Acamprosate may work better if you are not drinking alcohol (abstaining) for 3 days before starting it
- Take by mouth and swallow with water and **do not** chew
- If you start drinking alcohol (relapse) while on Acamprosate, keep taking it and talk to your provider as soon as you can
- If you are pregnant discuss with your prescriber whether to continue acamprosate
- ✗ **Adolescents and elderly persons** may be sensitive to acamprosate and should update providers on how they are feeling
- ✗ **Do not** take Acamprosate if you are breastfeeding or have renal impairment

When starting any new medication you may experience side effects.

Your pharmacist will provide a complete list for you and can answer your questions. Side effects from any of these medications should go away quickly.

Seek medical help immediately if you experience:

- Difficulty breathing
- Chest pain
- Severe abdominal pain
- Yellowing of the skin
- Vomiting many times during the day
- Prolonged fogginess or confusion
- Seizures

If side effects do not resolve or are severe contact your care provider, call 8-1-1 or go to the emergency department immediately.

Thank you to the Canadian Alcohol Use Disorder Society (www.cauds.org) and their founder, Dr. Jeff Harries, for their important contribution to this work in Interior Health and in the field of Alcohol Use Disorder treatment.