

MEDICATIONS FOR ALCOHOL USE DISORDER

Alcohol use disorder (AUD) is a medical condition in which a person continues to drink even when it's harmful for them. People with AUD may experience strong cravings for alcohol, get withdrawal symptoms if they stop drinking, and have difficulty controlling their drinking even when they want to. Being diagnosed with AUD can be really hard, but the good news is that effective treatment is available. Medications for AUD are safe and very helpful for many people.



HOW CAN MEDICATION HELP?

Like other illnesses such as depression, AUD is caused by biological, psychological, and social factors, and just like these other illnesses, it's very hard to manage on your own. Many people with AUD find that taking medication reduces their cravings and helps them meet their drinking goals. Medication is not a cure for AUD, but a tool that people can use, either on its own or alongside other tools like counselling or peer support. Cravings and withdrawal symptoms can be very powerful, and medication can alleviate these issues. You can take it for as long as you're finding it helpful, whether that's a few months, a few years, or forever.

WHAT ARE THE OPTIONS?

Choice of medication depends on your drinking goals, other medications you're taking, other medical conditions you have (like depression or anxiety), and what kind of drug plan you have. The most common medications for treating AUD are naltrexone, acamprosate, and gabapentin. The side effects of these medications are usually mild and go away after a few days, and you can talk to your health care provider if they're bothering you.

NALTREXONE

- Reduces your urges to drink - if you do drink, you'll find you don't enjoy it as much
- Good choice for people who want to reduce their drinking, and also works for people who want to be abstinent
- You don't have to stop drinking before you start taking it
- You shouldn't take it if you are taking opioids (it will cause severe withdrawal)

ACAMPROSATE

- Relieves symptoms of post-acute alcohol withdrawal (insomnia, low mood, cravings)
- Works best for people who have abstinence as a goal
- Best to be abstinent for a few days before starting

GABAPENTIN

- Relieves symptoms of alcohol withdrawal (tremor, agitation, anxiety)
- Good choice for people who have abstinence as a goal but are having trouble stopping because of withdrawal symptoms

COLD TURKEY IS DANGEROUS!



If you experience withdrawal symptoms (like shaking, sweating, or vomiting) when you don't drink, **cold turkey (stopping drinking suddenly) can be life-threatening.**

If you plan to stop drinking, you will need some extra medical support to do it safely.

www.metaphi.ca/wp-content/uploads/Pamphlet_AlcoholWithdrawal.pdf



WHEN CAN I START MEDICATION?



Medication can usually be prescribed at your first medical visit. If you have uncomfortable side effects, if the medication doesn't seem to be working, or if you find you're not taking it, be sure to let your health care team know so that they can adjust your dose or suggest something else. If you're looking for a health care provider, a rapid access addiction medicine (RAAM) clinic might be a good option.

<https://www.metaphi.ca/raam-clinics>

WHAT ELSE DO I NEED TO DO?

Everyone has different goals, and there's no one right path. You may want to try counselling, peer support, getting more involved with your community, or something else that helps you meet your goals and feel better. Your health care team will support you to come up with a plan that's right for you.

HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?

If you have any questions about AUD treatment, you should speak to your health care provider. You can also find more information and resources on the META:PHI website.