

NALTREXONE:

Naltrexone can reduce craving and increase abstinence for individuals dependent on opioids or alcohol



Naltrexone, an opioid antagonist, blocks the effects of opioid drugs (such as morphine, heroin, and oxycodone) in the brain and decreases the craving for alcohol by reducing the intoxicating effects. As such, it helps to eliminate alcohol- or drug-seeking behavior and to prevent relapse. It is an effective, yet underutilized, medication that can help individuals remain abstinent from alcohol and opioids. It is important to note that naltrexone **does not** reduce the effects of alcohol that impair coordination and judgment.

Naltrexone has many positive characteristics, including:

- no associated intoxication
- no potential for abuse
- does not cause physical dependence
- when stopped, it does not cause withdrawal symptoms
- an unlikely candidate for black market sales or other unintended uses

Individuals must be completely opioid-free before taking naltrexone. Using naltrexone while on opioids can precipitate severe withdrawal symptoms.

Naltrexone requires a prescription from a licensed medical provider. Prescriptions are usually issued in an outpatient medical setting or after medical detoxification in a residential setting.

Naltrexone is currently available in three forms:

- ReVia® or Depade®, pills taken orally on a daily basis, generally for weeks to months; standard dosage levels exist, and courses of therapy can be adjusted for the individual
- Vivitrol®, a new long-acting formulation of the medication, given monthly by intramuscular injection, administered by a health care professional

Naltrexone is suited for opioid-dependent patients who are:

- Highly motivated, recently detoxified patients who desire total abstinence and whose circumstances may increase their motivation.
- Other potential candidates may include opioid-dependent persons who prefer to try alternative pharmacotherapy prior to buprenorphine or methadone; or persons currently abstinent but concerned about possible relapse.

Naltrexone is suited for alcohol-dependent patients who are:

- Highly motivated and need additional support to resist the temptation to drink by limiting alcohol's pleasurable effects.
- Other potential candidates may include alcohol-dependent persons who desire help in reducing cravings for alcohol.

Naltrexone is an effective medication that can help to eliminate alcohol- or drug-seeking behavior and reduce relapse.



Naltrexone can be a highly effective part of a comprehensive recovery program. Chances of a favorable treatment outcome increase with:

- a positive therapeutic relationship
- effective counseling or therapy and aftercare/support
- careful monitoring of medication compliance
- patient and family education about the medication
- use of motivational incentives, such as rewards for maintaining abstinence

Side effects -- when taken as directed, naltrexone's side effects are:

- uncommon
- generally minor
- temporary

Toxic effects on the liver are rare but have been reported; blood tests of liver function should be performed prior to, and periodically during, treatment to determine if liver toxicity is taking place.

Contraindications -- naltrexone should not be taken by:

- persons currently using, or unable to abstain from opioids
- persons using opioids for the treatment of acute or chronic pain
- pregnant or breastfeeding women
- persons with severe liver or kidney damage

For more information:

SAMHSA's Medication Assisted Treatment for Substance Use Disorders website:

<http://dpt.samhsa.gov/medications/naltrexone.aspx>

Principles of Drug Addiction Treatment: A Research-Based Guide (2nd edition):

<https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/principles-drug-addiction-treatment>

The Facts about Naltrexone (patient education booklet):

http://www.kap.samhsa.gov/products/brochures/pdfs/naltrexone_facts.pdf

Sources for the information in this fact sheet:

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMH0000853/>

<http://dpt.samhsa.gov/medications/naltrexone.aspx>

<http://www.atforum.com/pdf/NTX-Opioid.pdf>

For more information, including a POATS Resource List, please visit the NIDA/SAMHSA Blending Initiative section of the Addiction Technology Transfer Center Network website, <http://www.attcnetwork.org>.

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