

NALTREXONE FACT SHEET

The effect of alcohol and Naltrexone on the brain

How does Naltrexone help me stop drinking?

Naltrexone blocks the effects of drugs known as opioids. It competes with these drugs for opioid receptors in the brain. While the precise mechanism of action for the medication's effect in alcohol treatment is unknown, there are three kinds of effects. First, naltrexone can reduce craving, which is the urge or desire to drink. Second, naltrexone helps patients remain abstinent. Third, naltrexone may interfere with the tendency to want to drink more if a recovering patient has a drink.

Does Naltrexone work?

In research evaluating the effects of medication for alcohol dependence, people with alcohol dependence who received medication were twice as successful in remaining abstinent and in avoiding relapse as those who received placebo—an inactive pill.

If I drink, will Naltrexone make me sober if I take it?

No, naltrexone will not stop you being drunk if you drink. It does not reduce the effects of alcohol that impair coordination and judgement.

How long does naltrexone take to work?

Naltrexone effects on blocking opiate receptors will occur shortly after you have taken the first dose. The effects of naltrexone in helping patients remain abstinent and avoid relapse to alcohol use also occur early after first use.

Are there some people who should not take naltrexone?

Naltrexone for alcohol dependence should not be used with pregnant women, individuals with severe liver or kidney damage or with patients who cannot achieve abstinence for at least 5 days prior to initiating medications.

Is naltrexone addictive?

No, naltrexone is not addictive.

Will naltrexone affect my ability to feel pleasure?

While it does seem to reduce alcohol craving, it does not interfere with the experience of other types of pleasure such as sexual pleasure.

What does it feel like on naltrexone?

Patients usually report that they are largely unaware of being on naltrexone. Naltrexone usually has no psychological effects and patients don't feel either "high" or "down".

What are the side effects of naltrexone?

In the large studies of naltrexone side effects occurred in less than 1 in 10 people. The side effects that occurred were nausea, headache, dizziness, fatigue, insomnia, anxiety, and sleepiness. These side effects were usually mild and of short duration. In treating alcohol abuse nausea has been severe enough to discontinue naltrexone in less than 10% of the patients starting it. For most other patients side effects are mild or of brief duration. One serious possibility is that naltrexone can have toxic effects on the liver. Blood tests of liver function are performed prior to the onset of treatment and periodically during treatment to determine whether naltrexone should be started and whether it should be discontinued if the relatively rare side effect of liver toxicity is taking place.

Can I take other medications with naltrexone?

Naltrexone is likely to have little impact on other medications patients commonly use such as antibiotics, non-opioid analgesics (e.g., aspirin, acetaminophen, ibuprofen), and allergy medications. You should inform your physician of whatever medication you are currently taking so that possible interactions can be evaluated. The major active effect of naltrexone for alcohol dependence is on opioid drugs. This class of drug is used to treat pain. The medication may therefore block the effect of any painkillers. Tell your physician if you are taking painkillers and they can prescribe non-narcotic pain reliever which can be used effectively while you are on the medication for alcohol dependence.

Will I get sick while on naltrexone?

No, Naltrexone may reduce the feeling of intoxication and the desire to drink more, but it will not cause a severe physical response to drinking.

Source:

Sydney Alcohol Treatment Group – <http://www.alcpharm.med.usyd.edu.au/>