

Naltrexone

Naltrexone is a medication used in medication-assisted treatment (MAT) to treat both opioid and alcohol use disorders. Naltrexone is sold under the trade names Revia and Depade and an injectable form called Vivitrol.

What Is Naltrexone?

Naltrexone is a medication approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to treat opioid use disorders and alcohol use disorders. It comes in a daily pill form or as a monthly injectable. Naltrexone can be prescribed by any health care provider who is licensed to prescribe medications. To reduce the risk of precipitated withdrawal, patients are warned to abstain from illegal opioids and opioid medication for a minimum of 7-10 days before starting naltrexone. If switching from methadone to naltrexone, the patient has to be completely withdrawn from the opioids.

How Naltrexone Works

Naltrexone blocks the euphoric and sedative effects of drugs such as oxycodone, heroin, morphine, and codeine. It works differently in the body than buprenorphine and methadone, which activate opioid receptors in the body and suppress cravings. Naltrexone binds and blocks opioid receptors, and is reported to reduce reactivity to triggers and decreases opioid cravings. There is no abuse and diversion potential with naltrexone. If a person relapses and uses the problem drug, naltrexone prevents the feeling of getting high.

Patients on naltrexone may have reduced tolerance to opioids and may be unaware of their potential sensitivity to the same, or lower, doses of opioids that they used to take. If patients who are treated with naltrexone relapse after a period of abstinence, it is possible that the dosage of opioid that was previously used may have life-threatening consequences, including respiratory arrest and circulatory collapse.

Vivitrol / Extended Release injection for Opioid Use Disorders

Extended-release injectable naltrexone is approved for treatment of people with opioid use disorder. It can be prescribed by any healthcare provider who is licensed to prescribe medications, special training is not required.

Naltrexone for Alcohol Use Disorders

Naltrexone blocks opioid receptors that are involved in the rewarding effects of drinking and the craving for alcohol. It has been shown to reduce cravings and to reduce relapse to problem drinking in some patients.

Side Effects of Naltrexone

- Upset stomach or vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Headache
- Nervousness
- Sleep problems/tiredness
- Joint or muscle pain

Naltrexone has not been shown to be safe for use during pregnancy.

Naltrexone may cause liver injury, may cause an allergic pneumonia, and reactions may occur from the injectable naltrexone. Seek evaluation if you have symptoms and or signs of these conditions.

People using naltrexone should not use any other opioids or illicit drugs; drink alcohol; or take sedatives, tranquilizers, or other drugs.

As with all medications used in medication-assisted treatment (MAT), naltrexone is to be prescribed as part of a comprehensive treatment plan that includes counseling and participation in a recovery program.