

Discussing Naltrexone Treatment

Bring this discussion guide to the clinician who may prescribe naltrexone. Use it to compare the plan for alcohol or opioid use disorder, confirm the formulation, and prepare for safe starting and follow-up.

Keep completed notes private. Use short notes in each box; continue on another copy or separate paper when needed. Save the completed PDF on your device and reopen it to check your notes before closing.

What the medicine does

Naltrexone blocks opioid effects and can reduce alcohol cravings. It comes as oral tablets; extended-release naltrexone is also given by a healthcare professional as a monthly injection. Medication is used with other recovery support. It does not treat alcohol or opioid withdrawal. [1] [2]

Starting requires a personal plan

Recent opioid exposure can cause naltrexone to trigger sudden, severe withdrawal, including when it is prescribed for alcohol problems. Tell the clinician about opioid pain, cough or diarrhea medicines; nonprescribed opioids; and methadone or buprenorphine. Do not stop prescribed treatment to make yourself ready without a coordinated plan. [1] [2]

A number of days is not clearance to start

For Vivitrol, labeling recommends at least 7–10 opioid-free days after short-acting opioids; people switching from methadone or buprenorphine can remain vulnerable to precipitated withdrawal for up to two weeks. The formulation, recent substances, symptoms and clinical assessment matter. Follow your prescriber's specific starting instructions rather than counting days yourself. [2]

Plan for pain, missed treatment and side effects

Decisions to make with the team [1] [2]

- Tell medical and dental professionals you take naltrexone before treatment; carry medicine identification. Opioid pain medicines may not work as expected.
- Do not try to overcome opioid blocking by taking larger opioid amounts. This can cause fatal overdose.
- After an injection wears off, is missed or treatment ends, reduced opioid tolerance increases overdose risk. Ask about naloxone and how to recognize an overdose.
- For the injection, promptly report severe pain, substantial swelling, blistering or an open wound at the injection site. For either formulation, promptly report yellow skin or eyes, dark urine or significant abdominal pain.

If overdose is suspected

Unresponsiveness or slow/difficult breathing needs immediate action: give naloxone if available, call 911 and remain with the person. Follow dispatcher instructions; improvement does not remove the need for emergency care. [3] [4]

Opening words you can adapt

Original script: "I want to understand whether naltrexone fits my goals. I last used or took these substances and medicines: _____. Which form are we considering, what must happen before starting, and what should I do if pain treatment or a missed dose comes up?"

My discussion and follow-up notes

My goal and formulation

Alcohol or opioid-related goal; oral tablet or injection; benefits and alternatives discussed.

What fits my routine and preferences

Tablet routine or injection visits, travel, costs/coverage, concerns and my preference after discussion.

Recent substances and medicines to review privately

Names, last use, current symptoms and relevant liver/other health history. Bring the actual medicine list.

Clinician's starting plan

Assessment or tests, starting instructions and who confirms readiness; do not use this field as self-clearance.

Ongoing schedule and missed-dose contact

Refill or injection date, clinic number and the instructions provided for an interruption.

Pain care and urgent symptoms

How to alert other clinicians, where medicine identification is kept, and who to call.

Overdose-response plan

Naloxone access and training, chosen support person, and next appointment.

Keep completed notes private. Share only what you choose with the people helping you. These are original educational and planning prompts, not a validated assessment.

Sources and Further Reading

[1] MedlinePlus: Naltrexone

<https://medlineplus.gov/druginfo/meds/a685041.html>

[2] DailyMed: Vivitrol prescribing information and Medication Guide

<https://dailymed.nlm.nih.gov/dailymed/drugInfo.cfm?setid=cd11c435-b0f0-4bb9-ae78-60f101f3703f>

[3] CDC: Preventing Opioid Overdose

<https://www.cdc.gov/overdose-prevention/prevention/>

[4] CDC: 5 Things to Know About Naloxone

<https://www.cdc.gov/overdose-prevention/reversing-overdose/about-naloxone.html>