

# MAUD BASICS FOR PEER RECOVERY WORKFORCE

## What are medications for alcohol use disorder?

In the United States, 29.6 million people have alcohol use disorder (AUD).<sup>1</sup> Evidence-based medications exist to treat AUD. There are three FDA-approved, effective medications for alcohol use disorder (MAUD). They are:



### Naltrexone

**Basics:** Naltrexone makes drinking alcohol less pleasurable. It reduces cravings and decreases how often and how much people drink.<sup>2</sup> It does not interact with alcohol, so it will not make someone sick if they drink while taking it. People who are still drinking can take naltrexone.<sup>2</sup>

**How to take it:** Naltrexone can be taken daily as a pill or given as an injection once a month in a doctor's office.<sup>2</sup> Once started, treatment usually lasts three to four months, though some people take it for longer than that.

**May be a good fit for** people who want to reduce their drinking, but not necessarily quit altogether.

**Not a good fit for** people who are using opioids, as naltrexone will cause intense opioid withdrawal, making them very sick.<sup>2</sup>



### Acamprosate

**Basics:** Acamprosate reduces alcohol cravings.<sup>2</sup> It helps people stop drinking and helps prevent a return to drinking.<sup>2</sup> It does not interact with alcohol, so it will not make someone sick if they drink while taking it. People who are still drinking can take acamprosate.

**How to take it:** Acamprosate is taken as a pill three times daily.

**May be a good fit for** people with liver problems.<sup>2</sup>

**May not be a good fit for** people who will have a hard time remembering to take three pills a day.



### Disulfiram

**Basics:** Disulfiram works best for people who are no longer drinking. The medication impairs the liver's ability to process alcohol.<sup>2</sup> If someone drinks while taking disulfiram, they will quickly experience effects like nausea, dizziness, headaches or difficulty breathing.<sup>2</sup>

**How to take it:** Disulfiram is taken as a tablet once daily.

**May be a good fit for** people who wish to stop drinking entirely.<sup>2</sup>

**Not a good fit for** people who want to reduce their drinking but not necessarily quit altogether.



## Video resources

For short videos about the three FDA-approved MAUD options, check out [learning.pcass-maud.org/mini-videos](https://learning.pcass-maud.org/mini-videos) or click on each medication name above to go directly to that medication's video.

## All three medications:<sup>3,4</sup>

- Are prescribed by a primary care doctor or addiction specialist.
- Are not addictive and cannot be misused.
- Should not be started while someone is physically dependent on alcohol.
- Can be most effective alongside counseling.

## Frequently asked questions

***Is taking MAUD just exchanging one addiction for another?***

**No.** MAUD is designed to treat AUD just like any other medication designed to treat a chronic condition (e.g., taking insulin for diabetes), and it is not addictive.<sup>5</sup>

***What is more effective, therapy or medication?***

**Both have been shown to be effective.** There is no one-size-fits-all treatment for AUD. What works for one person may not work for another. Multiple evidence-based treatments, as well as attending 12-step or other mutual support groups, can be tailored or combined to help people achieve better outcomes.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. (2024). Alcohol use disorder (AUD) in the United States: Age groups and demographic characteristics. Retrieved August 20, 2024, from <https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/alcohols-effects-health/alcohol-topics/alcohol-facts-and-statistics/alcohol-use-disorder-aud-united-states-age-groups-and-demographic-characteristics>

<sup>2</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2021). Prescribing pharmacotherapies for patients with alcohol use disorder. <https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/PEP20-02-02-015.pdf>

## Key facts to remember



**Alcohol use disorder is chronic and relapsing.** It's a process, and just because one medicine did not work for someone previously does not mean that it might not work at a later point in their life or that another medicine will not work.



**Alcohol withdrawal can be extremely dangerous.** Unlike withdrawal from other medications, which can be extremely uncomfortable but not fatal, alcohol withdrawal can kill someone. Be extremely careful when withdrawing from alcohol or supporting someone else who is withdrawing. There are medications available to help.



**Improvement in AUD can look many different ways.** Sobriety is not the only form of success. Recovery is a process of change through which people improve their health and wellness, live a self-directed life and strive to reach their full potential.<sup>7</sup> There are many positive advantages to one's health and wellbeing that can come from reductions in drinking and making safer choices around alcohol use.

- » As a peer, you can help people make progress on their recovery journey (however they choose to define it) by using [Motivational Interviewing](#) techniques to talk to them about the pros and cons of beginning MAUD. You can also work with people to plan out and gauge their progress toward life goals.

## Where can participants go from here?

Alcohol treatment can be accessed in person and online through telehealth. The NIAAA [Alcohol Treatment Navigator](#) has a database of programs, therapists and doctors that can be searched by ZIP code. It also has resources to help you ask participants the right questions to find high-quality care that is right for them.

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<sup>3</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2024, March 29). Naltrexone. <https://www.samhsa.gov/medications-substance-use-disorders/medications-counseling-related-conditions/naltrexone>

<sup>4</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2024, March 28). Medications, counseling, and related conditions. [https://www.samhsa.gov/medications-substance-use-disorders/medications-counseling-related-conditions#:~:text=Medications%20for%20Alcohol%20Use%20Disorder%20\(MAUD\)](https://www.samhsa.gov/medications-substance-use-disorders/medications-counseling-related-conditions#:~:text=Medications%20for%20Alcohol%20Use%20Disorder%20(MAUD))

<sup>5</sup> National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. (2024, June). Treatment for alcohol problems: Finding and getting help. <https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/brochures-and-fact-sheets/treatment-alcohol-problems-finding-and-getting-help#pub-toc3>

<sup>6</sup> Witkiewitz, K., Litten, R. Z., & Leggio, L. (2019, September 25). Advances in the science and treatment of alcohol use disorder. *Science Advances*, 5(9), Article eaax4043. <https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/sciadv.aax4043>

<sup>7</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2012, February). SAMHSA'S working definition of recovery. <https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/pep12-recdef.pdf>