

fact sheet

ALCOHOL DEPENDENCE

What is alcohol dependence?

Alcohol dependence is defined by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) as a “maladaptive pattern of alcohol use, leading to clinically significant impairment or distress” and is listed in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV).^{1,2}

Is alcohol dependence a medical disease?

Historically, alcohol dependence was considered to be a failure of will. Now, alcohol dependence is understood to be a serious, chronic disease with underlying neurological and genetic factors.^{3,4}

How prevalent is alcohol dependence?

Approximately 18 million people in the U.S. are dependent on or abuse alcohol, and 50 percent of these individuals are alcohol dependent.⁵

Approximately four percent of the U.S. population ages 18 or older are considered alcohol dependent.⁶

In the U.S., an estimated 2.2 million people receive treatment for alcohol dependence or abuse each year.⁷

Is alcohol dependence treated with medications?

Since patients may respond differently to specific types of treatment, the course of therapy should be tailored to the individual as determined by a health care professional.⁸ Experts in the field increasingly recommend the use of medication and psychosocial support in the treatment of alcohol dependence.^{6,8}

NIAAA recently issued new guidelines, which support the combination of medicines and professional counseling as part of an integrated treatment regimen.

Are current treatment approaches successful in preventing relapse?

The process of recovery from alcohol dependence often includes relapse. Approximately 50 percent of treated patients relapse back to drinking within the first few months of treatment and 75 percent relapse within the first year.⁹

Are there challenges for patients to adhere to daily medication for the treatment of alcohol dependence?

Adherence to a daily oral medication regimen is a general problem in medicine and is especially challenging in the context of alcohol dependence. In alcohol dependence, additional challenges include patient motivation toward treatment, impaired cognitive or functional ability, and denial.¹⁰

Can alcohol dependence be cured?

Although alcohol dependence can be treated, a cure is not available. Few people are able to recover from alcohol dependence without assistance; however, with treatment and support, many individuals with alcohol dependence are able to recover.¹¹

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What is psychosocial support?

Psychosocial support is considered an important part of treatment for alcohol dependence and includes counseling, self-help groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous and other commonly used behavioral treatments such as motivation enhancement therapy, cognitive-behavioral therapy, and 12-step facilitation therapy.

What medications are available for the treatment of alcohol dependence?

As researchers have gained a deeper understanding of the complex brain mechanisms that trigger alcohol dependence, medications are increasingly considered to be important treatment options for this disease. The NIAAA recently issued new guidelines, which support the combination of medications and psychosocial support as part of an integrated treatment program. Four medications are currently FDA approved for the treatment of alcohol dependence:

- VIVITROL™ (naltrexone for extended-release injectable suspension) is a once-monthly extended-release formulation of naltrexone.
- Naltrexone is available as an oral medication that must be taken once-daily.
- Acamprosate calcium is an oral medication taken three times daily.
- Disulfuram is an oral, aversive therapy taken once-daily that produces a negative reaction when alcohol is consumed.

What are the costs associated with alcohol dependence?

The economic burden to society of alcohol dependence and abuse accounts for approximately \$185 billion annually in the U.S.¹²

On average, untreated alcoholics incur general health care costs at least 100 percent higher than those of non-alcoholics.¹³

Full prescribing information about VIVITROL is available at www.vivitrol.com.

1 Subcommittee on Health Services Research, National Advisory Council on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. Executive Summary: Improving the Delivery of Alcohol Treatment and Prevention Services: A National Plan for Alcohol Health Services Research. NIAAA; 2000.

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3 <http://www.niaaa.nih.gov/FAQs/General-English/>. Retrieved March 16,2006.

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6 Saitz R. Unhealthy Alcohol Use. *New England Journal of Medicine*; 2005; 352:596-607.

7 SAMHSA, Office of Applied Studies. Substance Dependence, Abuse and Treatment Tables; 2003.

8 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health, *Helping Patients Who Drink too Much: A Clinician's Guide*, 2005.

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13 Langenbucher JW, McCrady B, Brick J, Esterly, R. *Executive Summary: Socioeconomic Evaluations of Addictions Treatment: Prepared for the Presidents Commission on Model State Drug Laws*. Center of Alcohol Studies, Rutgers University; 1992.