

**Baclofen for maintenance
treatment of alcohol
dependence**

**Gwent Specialist Substance
Misuse Service**

Baclofen is a medication that works on the GABA* system in the brain (part of the 'calming' system in the brain). It is a muscle relaxer and antispasmodic agent used to treat muscle symptoms caused by certain conditions such as Multiple Sclerosis and spinal cord injury/disease.

It is an 'old' drug which has been on the market for about 40 years, therefore we have a good understanding of its adverse side effects and experience of its use. Although it is only licensed to be used in Multiple Sclerosis and spinal cord injury/ disease it is also used for number of other un-authorized indications e.g.: hiccups, trigeminal neuralgia, and cerebral spasticity.

Recent research suggests that baclofen can help people stay abstinent from alcohol.

(*Gamma Amino Butyric Acid)

How does Baclofen help in alcohol dependence?

Alcohol increases the firing rates of 'rewarding pathways' in the brain leading to 'positive reinforcing effects' such as euphoria. GABA receptor activation by baclofen decreases the firing rate in the reward pathways and reduces the reinforcing effects of alcohol. GABA is also involved in brain areas responsible for emotions so the use of baclofen can remove some of the emotional components of alcohol use.

Therefore, treatment with baclofen is intended to make the preoccupation with alcohol disappear from the mind; in other words, it is intended to get rid of craving. The ultimate goal is to feel free from the urge to drink alcohol.

Please note that baclofen is currently not licensed for prescribing for this purpose; however it is legitimate to do so as scientific data justifies this therapeutic use.

Important information about baclofen

- Baclofen may impair your thinking or reactions. Be careful if you drive or do anything that requires you to be alert. It is advisable not to drive or operate heavy machinery in the early stages of treatment.
- Drinking alcohol may increase certain side effects of baclofen.
- In some situations, it may endanger your physical safety to be in a state of reduced muscle tone.
- You may have withdrawal symptoms such as seizures or hallucinations, if you stop using baclofen suddenly after using it over a long period of time.
- Do not stop using baclofen without first talking to your doctor. You may need to gradually reduce the dose before you stop the medication completely.

Before taking baclofen

You should not use baclofen if you are allergic to it. To make sure you can safely take baclofen, tell your doctor if you have any of these other conditions:

- kidney disease
- epilepsy or other seizure disorder
- a history of stroke or blood clots

Using baclofen may increase your risk of developing an ovarian cyst. Talk with your doctor about your specific risk.

It is not known whether baclofen will harm an unborn baby. Tell your doctor if you are pregnant or plan to become pregnant while using this medication. It is not known whether baclofen passes into breast milk or if it could harm a nursing baby. You should not breast-feed while you are using baclofen.

Do not give this medication to anyone who is not prescribed it. Older adults may be more sensitive to the effects of this medicine.

Dosage and administration

The dose needed to maintain abstinence from alcohol is not standard and will be determined based on a patient's reactions and feelings during the administration of the medication and the progressive increase of dosage. The effective dose and the adverse side effects cannot be predicted before starting treatment.

A gradual increase in the dosage of the medication is essential to alleviate the adverse side effects that occur when increasing the dose too quickly. On average, it takes 6 to 12 weeks to reach the required dose. When the desired dose is reached and it is well tolerated, it is recommended to stay at that dose for 2 to 3 months (sometimes less and sometimes more) and then try to reduce the dose to find the lowest effective dose.

Side effects

The most common side effects are:

- Sleepiness
- Fatigue
- Dizziness
- Headaches
- Gastrointestinal disturbances e.g.: nausea, vomiting
- Urinating more than usual

Less common side effects are:

- Seizures (convulsions)
- Confusion, hallucinations
- Irregular heart beat
- Tremors
- Painful tingling in arms and legs (paraesthesia)

This is not a complete list of side effects described for this medication. Please call the doctor or inform your nurse if you experience any unusual symptoms. Some of the side effects will disappear as you continue with treatment.

What happens if I miss a dose?

Take the missed dose as soon as you remember. Skip the missed dose if it is almost time for your next scheduled dose. Do not take extra medicine to make up for the missed dose.

What happens if I overdose?

Seek emergency medical attention.

Overdose symptoms may include muscle weakness, vomiting, drowsiness, dilated or pinpoint pupils, weak or shallow breathing, fainting, or coma.

Consent for Treatment with Baclofen

- I hereby certify that I have received from Dr..... detailed information regarding the treatment with baclofen in high doses (HD) to treat my problems with alcohol.
- I know that this treatment has not received formal authorization from the competent authorities. I want to take this treatment despite the potential side effects because so far I have not found any effective solution to my problems with alcohol.
- I understand that the main side effects are drowsiness, fatigue, headaches, dizziness and sleep disturbance. In rare cases delirium may occur. Dr..... has informed me that this state of mental confusion requires stopping the increase of doses and perhaps stopping treatment.
- I have clearly informed Dr..... of all my medical history so that he/she could determine whether particular rules of caution should be applied to my baclofen prescription.
- I received and read the Patient information leaflet containing information about the medication. I am aware that I should inform the doctor about any serious/unusual symptoms.
- Due to possible withdrawal symptoms upon discontinuation of baclofen, I know that one should not abruptly stop taking baclofen, but gradually decrease as instructed by the doctor.
- I undertake not to drive my car or use dangerous machinery for at least the time of the increase in dosage and to resume such activities only in consultation with the doctor.
- I have had time to make my decision to undergo this treatment.

Read and consented

Name of patient: (print name)

Signature of patient: Date:

Name of doctor: (print name)

Signature of doctor: Date:

**"This document is available in Welsh /
Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg".**