

---

## **What is Naltrexone?**

Naltrexone is a drug that can be prescribed to alcohol dependant people to help them reduce cravings and abstain from drinking. It is an *opioid receptor antagonist* that primarily treats alcohol dependence and opioid dependence. Antagonists bind to receptors in the brain but instead of activating them, they block them. Naltrexone blocks the effects of opioids such as heroin, morphine and codeine.

## **How does it work in alcohol dependence?**

Naltrexone is not an alcohol blocker but it seems to interrupt the pathways in the brain that release endorphins when alcohol is drunk. Endorphins are naturally occurring chemicals that cause feelings of pleasure and relaxation. By blocking their effects, naltrexone reduces the pleasurable of alcohol and reduces cravings.

## **How well does it work?**

Naltrexone works for some people but not for others.

## **What are the side effects?**

Naltrexone can cause nausea, headaches, insomnia, dizziness and anxiety. In some cases a rash can develop. If any side effects are experienced, please discuss these with your doctor.

## **Who can take Naltrexone?**

Anyone taking opioid pain killers (e.g. codeine, morphine, tramadol) as the naltrexone will block the receptors and can cause severe withdrawals. Pregnant and breast feeding. People with liver or kidney disease.

## **How long can I take Naltrexone?**

Naltrexone is not meant to be a long term answer to alcohol dependence. Rather it is helpful in the initial stages following detoxification while you are learning ways of living life without alcohol. As such it will be prescribed alongside psychosocial interventions (see below) and will only be prescribed up to one year. However, if you relapse into drinking alcohol then the medication will be stopped and other treatment options made available to you.

## **Other things I need to do**

As part of your treatment you will need to receive psychosocial interventions. That means you will need to attend an alcohol treatment agency and engage in counselling work and any other therapies that they feel meet your needs. This is the main work that will move things forward and will help you to change the way you think and feel about alcohol. The naltrexone is a temporary help for you while you get this treatment underway. If you do not engage with the psychosocial interventions then the medication will be stopped.

**“This document is available in Welsh /  
Mae’r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg”.**