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PSYCHIATRY

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PATIENT EDUCATION

Disulfiram

Antabuse / Generic tablets

A guide for adults taking disulfiram.
Follow the directions on your prescription and your provider's recommendations.

AVOID ALL ALCOHOL

REACTIONS CAN OCCUR FOR 14 DAYS AFTER STOPPING

Formulations: Oral tablets are usually taken once daily. Treatment works best with an agreed recovery plan and practical support for regular dosing.

What it is used for

Disulfiram supports an alcohol-abstinence plan by causing an unpleasant and potentially dangerous reaction if alcohol is consumed. It does not directly treat withdrawal or reliably reduce cravings. It must be taken with your full knowledge and agreement.

How it works

It blocks aldehyde dehydrogenase, an enzyme that helps clear acetaldehyde after alcohol is broken down. Acetaldehyde then builds up, causing flushing, nausea, palpitations, and potentially severe illness.

What to expect over time

The alcohol reaction can persist well after a tablet is missed or treatment stops. Review adherence, recovery support, and whether the medication still fits your goals.

Taking your medication

- Do not start until at least 12 hours after alcohol and until your provider says it is appropriate.
- Avoid all alcohol during treatment and for up to two weeks after the last dose. Check medicines, mouthwash, foods, and other possible sources.
- Do not test the reaction by drinking.
- If you miss a dose, take it when you remember unless it is almost time for the next dose. Then skip it. Do not double a dose.

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Side effects and safety

Possible side effects

- Drowsiness, fatigue, or headache
- Metallic or garlic-like taste
- Skin rash
- Numbness or tingling from nerve injury, which needs review

Keeping track of treatment

Some side effects resolve with time; others may require a change of medication. Discuss persistent or bothersome side effects with your provider.

Liver tests are checked before treatment and during follow-up, often early after starting. Report symptoms of liver injury immediately. Track mood, nerve symptoms, and alcohol exposure.

If you take too much

For a suspected overdose, call Poison Control at **1-800-222-1222** immediately, even if you feel well. Call 911 for a seizure, collapse, trouble breathing, or inability to wake.

Before you start

Discuss liver disease, heart disease, psychosis, seizures, diabetes, and recent alcohol use. Severe heart disease and certain psychiatric conditions may rule out treatment.

Discuss pregnancy, pregnancy plans, and breastfeeding with your provider. Treatment decisions should consider both the medication and the condition being treated.

Medicines and interactions

Review all your medications with your provider, including over-the-counter medicines and supplements. Have new medications checked before taking them.

Do not combine with metronidazole or alcohol-containing medicines. Phenytoin, warfarin, isoniazid, and some sedatives can have important interactions.

Have cough syrups, tinctures, and other nonprescription preparations checked for alcohol.

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Living with your treatment

When to get help

Emergency symptoms. Call 911 for chest pain, fainting, severe breathing difficulty, or collapse after alcohol exposure. A disulfiram–alcohol reaction can be life-threatening.

Prompt medical advice. Stop taking disulfiram and obtain prompt medical advice for jaundice, dark urine, unusual fatigue, appetite loss, or right upper abdominal pain. Report new numbness, weakness, or confusion.

If you feel unsafe or have thoughts of self-harm, call 911 or go to an emergency department.

Your questions answered

Can I skip a dose so I can drink?
No. The reaction can occur for up to two weeks after stopping. Discuss a change in your alcohol-use goals with your provider.

Can someone put it in my drink or food?
No. It must never be given secretly or to someone who is intoxicated.

Everyday tips

Keep recovery support and an alcohol-exposure plan available.

Tell medical and dental teams that you take disulfiram.

Storage and safety

Keep medication in its labeled container, away from excess heat and moisture and out of reach of children and pets. Do not share it. Ask a pharmacy about disposal of unused medication.

Sources

MedlinePlus: Disulfiram

Educational handout; does not replace your prescription or provider's recommendations.