



- AUD is a common condition that affects many people. It can lead to problems with friends, family, work, and health.
- Treatment of AUD can take place in outpatient, residential, or inpatient settings. Treatment can involve behavioral treatment like counseling and medications.
- FDA-approved medications for AUD include naltrexone, acamprosate, and disulfiram. These medications can help people reduce or even stop drinking alcohol.
- Changing long-standing habits can be hard, and setbacks may happen especially when people get stressed. Behavioral therapies can help people develop skills to recognize and cope with their triggers.

Will Cordell, PharmD, November 2024

People who have alcohol use disorder (AUD) have trouble stopping or controlling alcohol use despite relationship, work, and health problems.¹ In 2023, 28.9 million people in the United States aged 12 years and older were diagnosed with AUD in the past year.² AUD is a brain disorder. Changes in the brain caused by alcohol can make it easier for people to relapse. People are more likely to be diagnosed with AUD if they misuse alcohol, begin drinking alcohol at an early age, have a family history of alcohol problems, or have certain mental health conditions like depression and anxiety.¹

Signs of Excessive Drinking:³

- Drinking more alcohol than intended.
- Unable to cut down or stop drinking alcohol.
- Needing more alcohol than in the past for the same effect.
- Drinking alcohol even if it makes you feel bad.
- Spending a lot of time drinking or thinking about drinking alcohol.
- Drinking alcohol causes problems with daily activities, family, friends, or work.

Types of Treatment:⁴

There are multiple options for treatment of AUD. Each type of treatment will not work the same for everyone. Understanding the different kinds of treatment can help people decide what is best for them.

- Counseling and therapy can help change drinking behaviors.
- Support groups like Alcoholics Anonymous® (AA) provide peer support to reduce drinking.
- Medications can reduce drinking by lowering alcohol cravings and by changing reward systems in the brain. Please see “Medications for Alcohol Use Disorder” section for more information.

Where to Seek Treatment:⁴

People can find treatment in different settings including outpatient, residential, and inpatient treatment. People should also be aware of the specific services offered by different types of providers.

- Primary care providers can provide medications and referrals to specialists.
- Psychiatrists can provide medications and behavioral treatments.
- Psychologists, social workers, and counselors can provide behavioral treatments.

Medications for AUD^{5,6,7}

Naltrexone, acamprosate, and disulfiram are the only three medications approved by the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for the treatment of AUD. There are no specific recommendations on how long people should take these medications. This decision is based on individual factors like personal preference, severity of illness, history of relapse, potential consequences of relapse, and how well people respond to and tolerate the medications.⁸

| Medication | How It Works | Side Effects | Available Forms |
|--|--|---|---|
| Naltrexone (Revia [®] , Vivitrol [®]) | Reduces alcohol cravings | Nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, headache, changes in appetite, pain at injection site (Vivitrol [®] only) Can decrease response to some prescription pain medications or cause a severe withdrawal reaction to these pain medications if taken together | Oral pill (Revia [®]) Long-acting injection (Vivitrol [®]) |
| Acamprosate (Campral [®]) | Reduces side effects that happen when decreasing alcohol consumption | Nausea, diarrhea, itching, sleep problems | Oral pill |
| Disulfiram (Antabuse [®]) | Discourages drinking by causing side effects from alcohol consumption, including but not limited to nausea, vomiting, headache, sweating, and flushing | Drowsiness, headache, changes in taste | Oral pill |

Resources

- Understanding Alcohol Use Disorder: [Understanding Alcohol Use Disorder | National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism \(NIAAA\) \(nih.gov\)](#)
- Rethinking Drinking Informational Booklet: [Rethinking Drinking: Alcohol and Your Health \(nih.gov\)](#)
- Treatment Options: [Treatment for Alcohol Problems: Finding and Getting Help | National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism \(NIAAA\) \(nih.gov\)](#)



Go online to find more information and to view the references for this toolkit.

aapp.org/617664

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