

Medication and Counseling Treatment

Medication-assisted treatment (MAT) is the use of medications with counseling and behavioral therapies to treat substance use disorders and prevent opioid overdose.

MAT Effectiveness

In 2013, an estimated 1.8 million people had an [opioid use disorder](#) related to prescription pain relievers, and about 517,000 had an opioid use disorder related to heroin use. MAT has proved to be clinically effective and to significantly reduce the need for inpatient detoxification services for these individuals. MAT provides a more comprehensive, individually tailored program of medication and behavioral therapy. MAT also includes support services that address the needs of most patients.

The ultimate goal of MAT is full [recovery](#), including the ability to live a self-directed life. This treatment approach has been shown to:

- Improve patient survival
- Increase retention in treatment
- Decrease illicit opiate use and other criminal activity among people with substance use disorders
- Increase patients' ability to gain and maintain employment
- Improve birth outcomes among women who have substance use disorders and are pregnant

Opioid Dependency Medications

Methadone, buprenorphine, and naltrexone are used to treat opioid dependence and addiction to short-acting opioids such as heroin, morphine, and codeine, as well as semi-synthetic opioids like oxycodone and hydrocodone. People may safely take medications used in MAT for months, years, several years, or even a lifetime. Plans to stop a medication must always be discussed with a doctor.

Methadone

Methadone tricks the brain into thinking it's still getting the abused drug. In fact, the person is not getting high from it and feels normal, so withdrawal doesn't occur. Learn more about [methadone](#).

Pregnant or breastfeeding women must inform their treatment provider before taking methadone. It is the only drug used in MAT approved for women who are pregnant or breastfeeding. Learn more about [pregnant or breastfeeding women and methadone](#).

Buprenorphine

Like methadone, buprenorphine suppresses and reduces cravings for the abused drug. It can come in a pill form or sublingual tablet that is placed under the tongue. Learn more about [buprenorphine](#).

<https://www.samhsa.gov/medication-assisted-treatment/treatment>

Naltrexone

Naltrexone works differently than methadone and buprenorphine in the treatment of opioid dependency. If a person using naltrexone relapses and uses the abused drug, naltrexone blocks the euphoric and sedative effects of the abused drug and prevents feelings of euphoria. Learn more about [naltrexone](#).

Alcohol Use Disorder Medications

Disulfiram, acamprosate, and naltrexone are the most common drugs used to treat alcohol use disorder. None of these drugs provide a cure for the disorder, but they are most effective in people who participate in a MAT program. Learn more about the impact of [alcohol](#) misuse.

Disulfiram

Disulfiram is a medication that treats chronic alcoholism. It is most effective in people who have already gone through detoxification or are in the initial stage of abstinence. This drug is offered in a tablet form and is taken once a day. Disulfiram should never be taken while intoxicated and it should not be taken for at least 12 hours after drinking alcohol. Unpleasant side effects (nausea, headache, vomiting, chest pains, difficulty breathing) can occur as soon as ten minutes after drinking even a small amount of alcohol and can last for an hour or more.

Acamprosate

Acamprosate is a medication for people in recovery who have already stopped drinking alcohol and want to avoid drinking. It works to prevent people from drinking alcohol, but it does not prevent withdrawal symptoms after people drink alcohol. It has not been shown to work in people who continue drinking alcohol, consume illicit drugs, and/or engage in [prescription drug misuse and abuse](#). The use of acamprosate typically begins on the fifth day of abstinence, reaching full effectiveness in five to eight days. It is offered in tablet form and taken three times a day, preferably at the same time every day. The medication's side effects may include diarrhea, upset stomach, appetite loss, anxiety, dizziness, and difficulty sleeping.

Naltrexone

When used as a treatment for alcohol dependency, naltrexone blocks the euphoric effects and feelings of intoxication. This allows people with alcohol addiction to reduce their drinking behaviors enough to remain motivated to stay in treatment, avoid relapses, and take medications. Learn more about how [naltrexone](#) is used to treat alcohol dependency.