

Acamprosate

What is acamprosate, and how does it work?

Acamprosate (Campral) is a medication that has been available for the treatment of alcohol dependence for a number of years in Canada, and longer in Europe. Acamprosate is started after a person has stopped alcohol use. Acamprosate is believed to restore the balance of brain chemicals, which has been disturbed by regular, heavy drinking. It is believed that this imbalance and discomfort makes some people return to drinking. Acamprosate may make it easier for people not to drink and helps to prevent relapse. Even if you do start drinking again, you should continue taking the medication.



How is acamprosate taken?

Acamprosate is normally started after a few days of abstinence, typically at a dose of 666 mg TID.

What are the side-effects of acamprosate?

Like most medications, acamprosate can cause side-effects, but they are usually mild and resolve within the first few weeks of treatment. The most common side-effects are gastrointestinal symptoms (such as loose bowel movements or mild diarrhea). You should tell your physician if you experience these or any other unexpected effects.

If you have kidney problems you should discuss this with your physician to see if this medication can be used. Sometimes a lower dose of acamprosate can be used.

What will happen if I drink alcohol while taking acamprosate?

Acamprosate does not:

- reduce effects of alcohol such as impaired coordination and judgment
- affect your blood alcohol level or “sober you up” if you drink
- change the way the body metabolizes (breaks down) alcohol, so it will not make you feel sick if you drink.

Can I take other medications with acamprosate?

Acamprosate can be taken with most medications. It has not been shown to interact significantly with other medications.

Tell your physician or pharmacist about the medications you are currently taking, so they can see if there may be possible interactions.



What will happen if I become pregnant while taking acamprosate?

If there is a possibility of becoming pregnant, use an effective method of birth control while taking acamprosate. If you miss a menstrual period, report this to your physician at once and take a pregnancy test. If you become pregnant, you will need to alert your physician to discuss ongoing treatment options. Your physician will help you abstain from alcohol during pregnancy. Your health should be monitored throughout your pregnancy, as should the health of your baby after delivery. Even though acamprosate should not be used during pregnancy, animal studies have not shown any ill effects, nor is there evidence that acamprosate causes birth defects.

Should I take acamprosate with a meal?

Acamprosate can be taken with or without food. Many people find that taking the medication after a meal helps to decrease gastrointestinal symptoms. Since acamprosate is usually taken three times a day, most people find it convenient to take it with meals; this also makes it easier to remember to take the medication.

Is it OK to crush the pills?

Acamprosate pills should not be crushed because they have a coating to make sure the medication is not absorbed until it has passed through the stomach. Destroying this coating can cause stomach upset.

What happens if I stop taking acamprosate suddenly?

Acamprosate does not cause physical withdrawal symptoms when it is stopped.

What happens if I miss a dose?

If you miss a dose of acamprosate, don't double the dose at the next scheduled time. There should be at least two hours between doses. If this is not possible, skip the dose and wait until your next scheduled dose.

If I take acamprosate, does it mean that I don't need other treatment for alcohol dependence?

No. Research has shown that acamprosate is most effective when combined with counselling and/or mutual support groups.

What is the relationship of acamprosate to AA and other mutual support groups?

There is no problem with participating in support groups while taking acamprosate. The medication is most likely to be effective for you if your goal is to stop drinking altogether. If other group members caution against taking any medications, refer them to the pamphlet "The AA Member—Medications and Other Drugs," which states that AA members should not "play doctor" and advise others on medication provided by medical practitioners or treatment programs.



Dosage and cost

The usual dosage is 666 mg three times per day. The dosage of 333 mg three times per day is sometimes used. The daily cost will be around \$6.

