

Disulfiram (Antabuse®/Etiltox®) - client information sheet

Description: Disulfiram is a medication used to treat alcohol dependence. It works by blocking an enzyme that breaks down alcohol in the body. This means that when people who are taking disulfiram drink alcohol, they develop a number of unpleasant symptoms known as the 'aldehyde reaction'.

- It can be very dangerous to drink alcohol while taking disulfiram.
- Unpleasant effects may occur after taking very small amounts of alcohol used in cooking or even if rubbed into the skin. For example, avoid alcohol-containing aftershave, perfumes/colognes, body lotions, vinegar and alcohol-containing mouthwash (e.g. listerine) and medicines, hand sanitiser. Even exposure to alcohol based hand sanitisers in some people can trigger a response, so hand-washing with soap and water is recommended instead.
- It should not be used if pregnant or breast feeding.

What is alcohol dependence?

Heavy long-term use of alcohol can cause changes in your brain. These changes make it harder for you to stop drinking and can result in dependence or addiction to alcohol. Disulfiram can help dependent people who have decided to give up drinking by deterring them from drinking again.

When should I start taking disulfiram?

You must wait at least 24 hours after your last alcoholic drink before starting disulfiram. You may need medical assistance with stopping alcohol if withdrawal symptoms develop. Speak with your doctor about this.

How long do the tablets take to work?

The 'aldehyde reaction' after taking disulfiram occurs straight away, so you must not drink any alcohol once you have begun taking the tablets. Disulfiram tablets are taken once daily.

Are there side effects?

The main side effects of disulfiram are usually short-lived. These include headaches, nausea, a metallic taste in the mouth and feeling tired. Very rarely, some serious side effects occur. **Stop taking the tablets and see your doctor if you experience** tingling, pain or weakness in the hands and feet, notice your skin or eyes have become yellow, notice a rash, develop abdominal pain, feel as though your mood has changed or you have abnormal thoughts, or have changes in your vision.

- People with high blood pressure or heart disease should not take disulfiram without specialist medical advice.
- People with an allergy to sulphur or nickel should not take disulfiram.

How will I feel taking these tablets?

Unless you experience side effects, you may not notice anything.

They should be taken preferably on waking although, if you experience a sedative effect, Disulfiram tablets may be taken at bedtime.

Disulfiram is not addictive.

Can I take other medications if needed?

It is important to let your doctor know if you are taking any other medications. Some antibiotics, drugs used for seizures, warfarin and certain sleeping tablets can interact with disulfiram. People who have severe liver or kidney disease should **not** use this medication. Disulfiram is not usually given to people with heart disease or those with certain types of mental illness (psychosis).

Will it be safe to drive?

Disulfiram is not a sedative medication and normally should not interfere with your ability to drive or operate heavy machinery. However, always assess your alertness before driving or operating machinery

What happens if I consume alcohol?

Alcohol in beverages, foods, some after-shave lotions and cough syrups can trigger the aldehyde reaction so you need to check the labels before taking/using them. **If alcohol is consumed, seek medical attention immediately as you can become very unwell.** An 'aldehyde reaction' begins with the person feeling flushed, hot and sweaty. This can be followed by palpitations, headaches, shortness of breath, chest pain and feeling like your airway is restricted. After this weakness, abdominal pain, vomiting and drowsiness occur.

What is the normal dose?

Your doctor will usually start you on half a tablet (100mg) and increase this to one tablet each day (200mg) over one or two weeks. Dissolve tablets in water before taking.

How long will I need to take disulfiram for?

You should take disulfiram for at least three months and most people need it for at least 12 months. Attending counselling and/or self-help groups will also assist you to stay off drinking. After you stop disulfiram, do not drink alcohol for at least seven days as your body needs to start making the enzyme again. Drinking alcohol earlier than this may trigger an 'aldehyde reaction'.

Disulfiram is not subsidised by the government as part of the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) but is still available with a doctor's prescription, ask your community pharmacy about the price.

This factsheet is to help you understand about your medicine. You must also read the manufacturer's Consumer Medicine Information (CMI) leaflet. You may find more on the internet but beware as internet-based information is not always accurate. Do not share medicines with anyone else.

For more information

Alcohol and Drug Information Service

Phone: 1300 13 1340

Confidential telephone counselling and information

8:30am to 10pm every day

www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/dassa

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