



New drugs to treat alcohol addiction not quick solutions

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Since addiction has become recognized as an illness, there has been a quest to have more traditional medication treatment alternatives. Two new medicines to help individuals with alcohol dependence, Campral and Vivitrol, have been introduced in the past five years. We'll explore the benefits and drawbacks surrounding these two medications.

Patients need to understand when using these medications is that the medicine can be a benefit, but it is not a miracle cure. The patient who has a full appreciation of the medicine's limitations and also a desire to seek treatment will experience the most success.

CAMPRAL

In 2004, the FDA approved a new medicine for the maintenance of abstinence in patients with alcohol dependence. This medicine, Campral (acamprosate calcium), was the first new medicine in almost a decade for the treatment of alcohol dependence.

Research has shown that individuals who abuse alcohol for a long period of time can upset the balance of chemicals in their brains. Campral was introduced to help restore the chemical balance that has been disrupted by long-term excessive drinking. Campral works by targeting an individual's craving to drink alcohol. The medicine's best outcome is to help the individual abstain from and stop thinking about the need for alcohol.

Campral is an oral medication and once an individual begins taking Campral, it usually takes about five days for it to reach effective levels in the body. To be most effective, the individual needs to take Campral for at least six months to a year while they are in treatment for their addiction.

Drawbacks to this medicine include its cost; which can be expensive, and the fact that individuals need to be responsible for taking the medicine three times a day as prescribed. Campral is safe to take with other prescription medications, including those for anxiety, depression and sleep disorders.

My experience has matched what the company has proposed - that Campral is effective for people who are motivated, committed to alcohol abstinence, and involved in other treatment programs and Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). Campral is not helpful for people who use it as a stand-alone treatment. Often people are looking for an easier, softer treatment, and they think Campral is the answer.

VIVITROL

In April 2006, Vivitrol became the first injectable drug available to treat alcohol dependence. The FDA approved Vivitrol for individuals in active treatment who have not had a drink for at least one week.

Since 1984 the oral version of this medication, naltrexone, has been available, and in 2006 the injectable version was developed to make it easier for people recovering from alcohol dependence to use more it consistently.

Vivitrol is a once-a-month injection that is similar to Campral in that its goal is to also reduce an individual's cravings for alcohol and to encourage abstinence.

Vivitrol is an opiate receptor antagonist medicine. It blocks the effect of the brain's natural opiate-like chemicals, which have a large number of normal functions in the brain that cause pleasurable experiences.

By reducing the pleasurable feeling an individual experiences while drinking,

Vivitrol's goal is to help individuals consume less alcohol and not have the desire to binge drink.

One drawback to Vivitrol is the cost. One injection costs can be very expensive and often requires a co-pay, if the individual has insurance. For those without insurance, this medicine can be cost prohibitive. It is recommended that the individual receive a monthly shot for a period of six months to a year to achieve the best results. If the individual cannot afford Vivitrol, Naltrexone, a once-a-day oral version of Vivitrol, is available at a lower cost.

With active on-going alcohol dependence treatment, Campral and Vivitrol can be effective medications to help an individual in recovery.

The individual needs to remember that they cannot just take the medication and see the same results as they would if they were getting both treatment and medication.

If you know someone or if you yourself are struggling with alcohol dependence, please seek the help of a professional.

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