

Patient information

Baclofen for the management of alcohol cravings

Gastroenterology Department

This leaflet contains information about baclofen, a medication that can be used to reduce alcohol cravings and maintain abstinence from alcohol.

What is baclofen?

Baclofen is a medicine that is usually used to treat muscle stiffness and spasms. Baclofen is not licensed for reducing alcohol cravings or maintaining abstinence, however, there is evidence that baclofen can be used safely for this indication. This is called “off-label” prescribing.

Is baclofen safe for me?

Baclofen is not suitable for everyone. We will discuss your medical history with you, but it is important that you let the Alcohol Care Team know if you have any of the following conditions:

- If you have ever had an allergic reaction to baclofen.
- If you have a stomach ulcer.
- If you have a history of epilepsy and seizures. There is a risk of increasing seizure frequency.
- Other conditions that we will ask about include, Parkinson's Disease, lung conditions, kidney problems or history of stroke.

What dose of baclofen will I be prescribed?

The Alcohol Care Team will decide the right dose of baclofen for you.

Baclofen is prescribed in 10mg tablets.

The usual starting dose of baclofen is 10mg (one tablet) three times daily. This can be increased to a maximum dose of baclofen 30mg (three tablets) three times daily. Baclofen should be taken with or just after food.

Some patients will need lower starting doses of baclofen due to their other medical conditions. This will be discussed at your clinic appointment.

Not all patients will require the maximum dose of baclofen to reduce their alcohol cravings and maintain abstinence from alcohol.

Your dose of baclofen will be discussed at each of your clinic appointments with the Alcohol Care Team.

Titration of baclofen

Baclofen will need to be increased slowly to reduce the risk of side effects.

Your alcohol specialist nurse will explain how to increase your baclofen dose. The dose is usually increased every seven days.

What do I do if I miss a dose of baclofen?

If you forget to take a dose of baclofen, take it as soon as you remember. If it is less than two hours until your next dose, it is better to leave out the missed dose and take your next one at the usual time.

Never take two doses at the same time.

Never take an extra dose to make up for the forgotten dose.

Stopping baclofen

Do not stop taking baclofen suddenly.

There is a risk of withdrawal side effects which can be like alcohol withdrawal.

You will need to gradually reduce the dose of baclofen to reduce the risk of getting withdrawal side effects.

Are there any side effects to baclofen?

Baclofen can cause side effects in some people, but many people have no side effects at all.

Side effects often improve as your body gets used to baclofen.

The most common reported side effects of baclofen include, feeling sleepy, tired, dizzy, nausea or vomiting, headache, dry mouth, blurred vision, increased need to urinate and difficulty sleeping.

Driving and using machines

Some people may feel drowsy and/or dizzy or have problems with their eyes while they are taking baclofen. If this happens, you should not drive or do anything that requires you to be alert (such as operating tools or machinery) until these effects have worn off.

Is baclofen safe with my other medications?

Baclofen does interact with some medications. The Alcohol Care Team will review your regular medicines with you to ensure that baclofen is safe.

We will ask you about the following:

- Medicines used to treat high blood pressure.
- Medicines used to treat anxiety, depression, bipolar affective disorder or schizophrenia.
- Medicines used to treat Parkinson's Disease.

Is baclofen safe if I am pregnant or breastfeeding?

If you are planning on becoming pregnant whilst on treatment with baclofen, it is important you let the Alcohol Care Team know.

Baclofen is not recommended in pregnancy.

Baclofen can be taken whilst breastfeeding. A small amount of baclofen does pass into the breast milk, but this has not been shown to cause any side effects in breastfed babies.

How can I get another prescription of baclofen?

When baclofen is being used to reduce alcohol cravings, the hospital will continue your regular prescriptions.

If you are running low on your baclofen tablets, you will need to contact the Alcohol Care Team to organise a repeat prescription.

This can be collected from the outpatient pharmacy on the Ground Floor of the Royal Liverpool Hospital.

Drinking alcohol with baclofen

We would recommend that you do not drink alcohol with baclofen.

If you experience breakthrough cravings for alcohol whilst taking baclofen, please contact the Alcohol Care Team.

Feedback

Your feedback is important to us and helps us influence care in the future.

Following your discharge from hospital or attendance at your outpatient appointment you will receive a text asking if you would recommend our service to others. Please take the time to text back, you will not be charged for the text and can opt out at any point. Your co-operation is greatly appreciated.

Further information

Alcohol Care Team

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All Trust approved information is available on request in alternative formats, including other languages, easy read, large print, audio, Braille, moon and electronically.

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