

Does adding medication to psychological treatment increase its effectiveness for treating alcohol use disorder (AUD)?

Clinical Question	What is the effectiveness of combined pharmacological and psychosocial interventions for AUD in adults?
Bottom Line	Results indicate that adding pharmacotherapy to psychosocial interventions may benefit people with AUD. It likely reduces heavy drinking and may lower the risk of alcohol consumption during abstinence. This is supported by reductions in craving severity and alcohol-related consequences. However, pharmacotherapy probably does not affect other alcohol outcomes (% of abstinent days and may not reduce the % of heavy-drinking days or the number of drinks per drinking day. Additionally, there was no increase in the number of serious adverse events, dropouts, or dropouts due to adverse events compared to psychosocial interventions alone..
Caveat	The review primarily focused on the combination of naltrexone (NLTX) and cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), with few studies evaluating other pharmacological and psychosocial combinations. The studies were conducted in the USA, Canada, and Europe, and participants were mainly middle-aged men without comorbid mental disorders limiting the generalizability to other populations.
Context	Alcohol use disorder (AUD) increases mortality and morbidity, causing acute risks like intoxication and injury, and chronic issues like cancer and heart disease. It impacts individuals and society, leading to disability, premature death, and economic costs. Psychosocial interventions include behavioral therapies, motivational interviewing, mutual help groups, twelve-step facilitation, psychodynamic therapy, and social network therapy. Medications used for AUD recovery include disulfiram (DIS), naltrexone (NLTX), acamprosate (ACA), and nalmefene (NLMF). Combining medical and psychosocial interventions may address both immediate and long-term AUD risks.
Cochrane Systematic Review	Minozzi S, La Rosa GR, Salis F, Camposeragna A, Saulle R, Leggio L, Agabio R. Combined pharmacological and psychosocial interventions for alcohol use disorder. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews 2025, Issue 3. Art. No.: CD015673. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD015673.pub2. This review contains 21 trials which included 4,746 participants.

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Systematic review link:

<https://www.cochranelibrary.com/cdsr/doi/10.1002/14651858.CD015673.pub2/full>