THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY WEXNER MEDICAL CENTER



### Screening, Counseling, and Pharmacotherapy for Unhealthy Alcohol Use in Primary Care Settings

Daniel E. Jonas, MD, MPH

Director, Division of General Internal Medicine Professor, Department of Internal Medicine Endowed Professor of Health Services Research College of Medicine, The Ohio State University

MedNet21

# **Objectives**

- 1. Describe unhealthy alcohol use
  - Define alcohol use disorder (AUD)
- 2. Understand the burden of unhealthy alcohol use
- 3. Review an evidence-based, practical approach for
  - Screening for unhealthy alcohol use
  - Providing appropriate interventions, with focus on
    - Behavioral counseling for risky drinking in primary care
    - Medications for AUD in outpatient settings
- 4. Incorporate cases that cover common clinical scenarios

### **Unhealthy Alcohol Use**

- Why this topic?
- Saw a great need
- Underutilized service
- Effective interventions
- Addressing a top cause of preventable morbidity and mortality
- · Challenging, interesting topic
- Many research, QI, and teaching opportunities

### **Unhealthy Alcohol Use**

#### **Risky Drinking**

 Consumption of alcohol above the recommended limits

#### **Alcohol Use Disorder**

- Difficulty controlling one's drinking
- Preoccupation with alcohol
- Continued use despite adverse consequences
- Drinking more to get the same effect
- Withdrawal upon cutting back or stopping alcohol use

### Case #1

- 35-year-old male with a history of asthma coming in for annual preventive health visit
- Otherwise healthy
- No medications other than inhalers
- Reports drinking 2 bourbon drinks each night on Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday
- Is that too much?

### How Much is "Too Much"?

Older US guidelines, recommended limits

### Men < 65

≤4 drinks/day and ≤14 drinks/week

### All women; men 65+

≤3 drinks/day and ≤7 drinks/week

### How Much is "Too Much"?

- However, health risks increase at very low levels of consumption
- 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans state that adults of legal drinking age can choose not to drink or to drink in moderation by limiting intake to
  - Men: 2 drinks or less in a day
  - Women: 1 drink or less in a day
  - Drinking less is better for health than drinking more

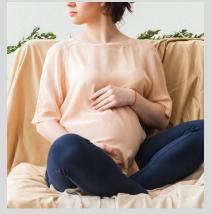
### Low levels of consumption can be problematic



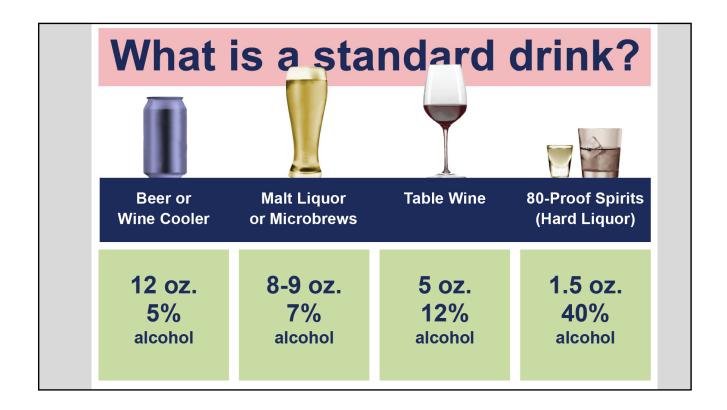
**Certain health conditions** 







Pregnancy





### Case #1, revisited

- 35-year-old man with a history of asthma coming in for annual preventive health visit
- Reports drinking 2 bourbon drinks each night on Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday
- Is that too much?
  - We need some more information about those drinks
  - If each is a standard drink (1.5 ounces of 80 proof liquor), then it's within the US dietary guidelines
  - We should have him complete a standardized screening questionnaire to better assess

# Case #2

- 56-year-old with history of hypertension, heart failure, and DVT
- Medications: Lisinopril, metoprolol, furosemide, warfarin
- They don't currently drink any alcohol, but they heard that it might be good for their cardiovascular health and ask if they should start having a glass of wine each night with dinner
- What is your advice?

### Who Should be Advised Not to Drink Any Alcohol?

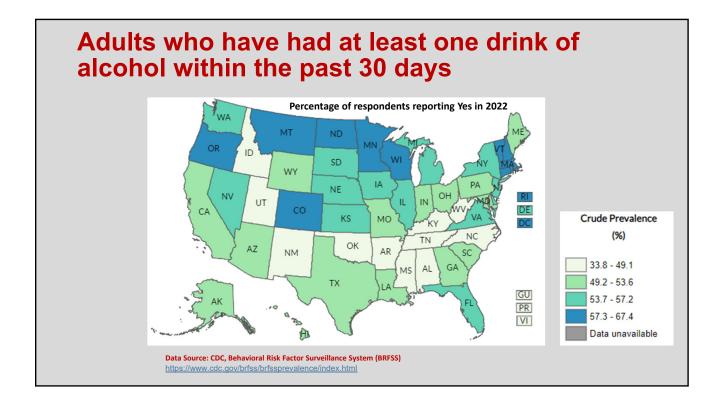
- Pregnant or might be pregnant
- Taking medications that interact with alcohol
- Have certain medical conditions
- Under 21 (minimum legal drinking age in US)
- Recovering from AUD or unable to control the amount
- Planning to drive a vehicle or operate machinery
- People who don't currently drink any alcohol and are considering whether they should start

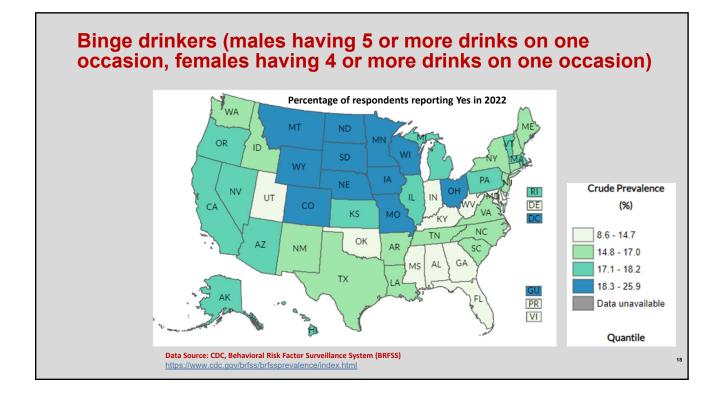
Common medications that can interact with alcohol							
Indication	Examples	Possible reactions with alcohol					
Allergies	Antihistamines (e.g., Diphenhydramine, Loratadine)	Drowsiness, dizziness, increased risk for overdose					
Anxiety	Benzodiazepines (e.g., Lorazepam)	Drowsiness, dizziness, increased risk for overdose; slowed or difficulty breathing; impaired motor control					
Arthritis	NSAIDS (e.g., Naproxen) and COX-2 inhibitors (Celecoxib)	Ulcers, stomach bleeding, liver damage					
Blot clots	Warfarin	Occasional drinking: internal bleeding. Heavier drinking: bleeding or opposite effect (blood clots, strokes, heart attacks)					
Depression	Antidepressants (e.g., Citalopram, Amitriptyline, Fluoxetine)	Drowsiness, dizziness, increased risk for overdose; increased feelings of depression or hopelessness					

Common	Common medications that can interact with alcohol							
Indication	Examples	Possible reactions with alcohol						
GERD, Heartburn, indigestion	H2 blockers (e.g., cimetidine)	Rapid heartbeat, increased alcohol effect						
High blood pressure	ACE inhibitors (e.g., Lisinopril, Quinapril)	Drowsiness, fainting, dizziness; arrhythmia						
High cholesterol	Statins (e.g., Atorvastatin)	Liver damage						
Infection	Metronidazole	Rapid heartbeat, sudden changes in blood pressure; stomach pain or upset; vomiting, headache						
Pain, fever, inflammation	NSAIDS (e.g., ibuprofen), Acetaminophen	Stomach upset, bleeding and ulcers; liver damage						
Sleep problems / Insomnia	Zolpidem, Eszopicline	Drowsiness, sleepiness, dizziness, increased risk for overdose; slowed or difficulty breathing; impaired motor control						

# **Prevalence of Unhealthy Alcohol Use**

- 20-30% of US adult population
- Most of those do not have AUD



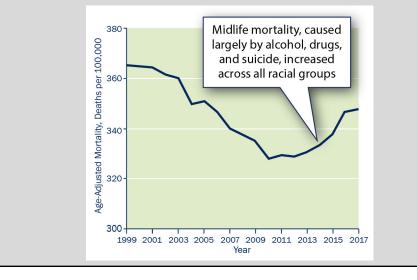


### Third leading cause of preventable deaths

- Around 100,000 deaths per year in the US
  - About 10,000 of those attributable to drunk driving
- 3<sup>rd</sup> for a relatively long time (after tobacco smoking and obesity)

# Major contributor to the recent decline in U.S. life expectancy

Age-adjusted all-cause mortality rates, US Adults aged 25-64 years



#### Health Problems Associated with High Average Alcohol Consumption and Heavy Per-occasion Use

- Cancers (oral cavity, esophagus, larynx, colon, rectum, liver, and breast)
- Gastrointestinal problems, e.g., liver cirrhosis, pancreatitis, gastritis, ulcers
- Cardiovascular problems, e.g., heart disease, hypertension, cardiomyopathy, stroke
- Mental health problems: e.g., depression, suicide, anxiety, cognitive impairment
- Preterm birth complications, fetal alcohol syndrome
- Injuries and violence
- Mortality

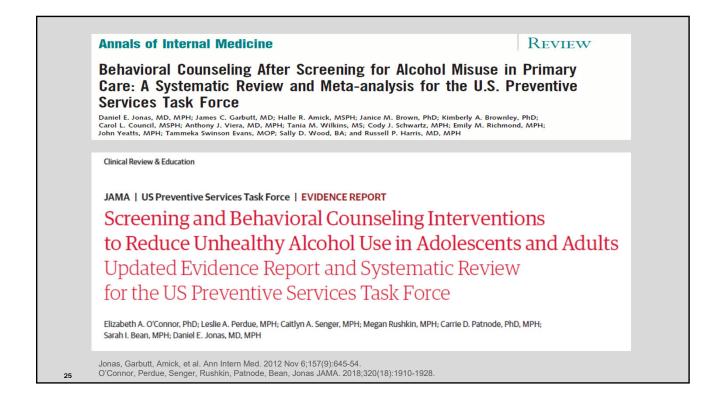
### Case #2, revisited

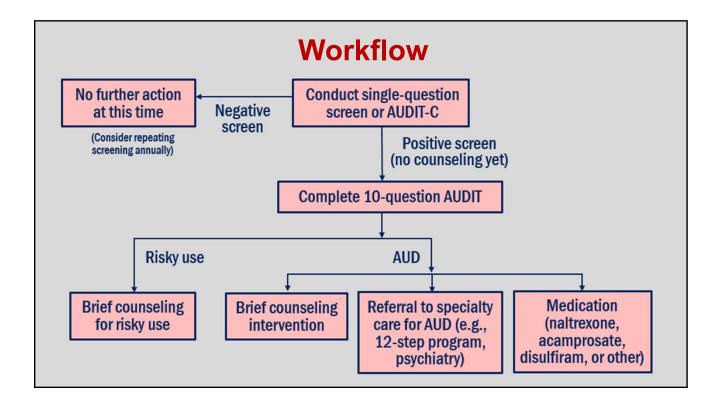
- 56-year-old with hx hypertension, heart failure, and DVT
- Medications: Lisinopril, metoprolol, furosemide, warfarin
- What is your advice?
  - Do not start drinking alcohol
  - There are some significant potential harmful interactions between alcohol and the medications they're taking
  - The best scientific evidence indicates that there are no cardiovascular health benefits
  - In fact, the risk for health problems increases at low levels of consumption

# Screening for Unhealthy Alcohol Use in Primary Care Settings

### **USPSTF Recommendation for Adults**

Population	Recommendation	Grade (What's This?)
Adults 18 years or older, including pregnant women	The USPSTF recommends screening for unhealthy alcohol use in primary care settings in adults 18 years or older, including pregnant women, and providing persons engaged in risky or hazardous drinking with brief behavioral counseling interventions to reduce unhealthy alcohol use.	B





	DIT-C	ers Identit	ication	Test-Concise	2	
	ten do you have				·	
Never	Monthly or less	2-4 times a	month 2	2-3 times a week	4 or more times a week	]
1 or 2	any drinks contair 3 or 4 5 or 6 7 en do you have f	to 9 10 or	more		day when you are drinkir	g?
Never	Less than mont	hly Monthly	Weekly	Daily or almost	t daily	

AUDIT-C	
AUDIT-C	
How often do you have a drink containing alcohol?	4
How many standard drinks containing alcohol do you have on a typical day?	1
How often do you have 5 or more drinks on one occasion?	2
AUDIT-C Score	
<ul> <li>Scores of ≥4 (men) or ≥3 (women) are considered positive</li> </ul>	

4

1

2

### AUDIT

Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test

How often do you have a drink containing alcohol?

How many standard drinks containing alcohol do you have on a typical day? How often do you have 5 or more drinks on one occasion?

How often during the last year have you found that you were not able to stop drinking once you had started?

How often during the last year have you failed to do what was normally expected from you because of drinking

How often during the last year have you been unable to remember what happened the night before because you had been

How often during the last year have you needed an alcoholic drink first thing in the morning to get yourself going after a night of

How often during the last year have you had a feeing of guilt or remorse after drinking?

Have you or someone else been injured as a result of your drinking?

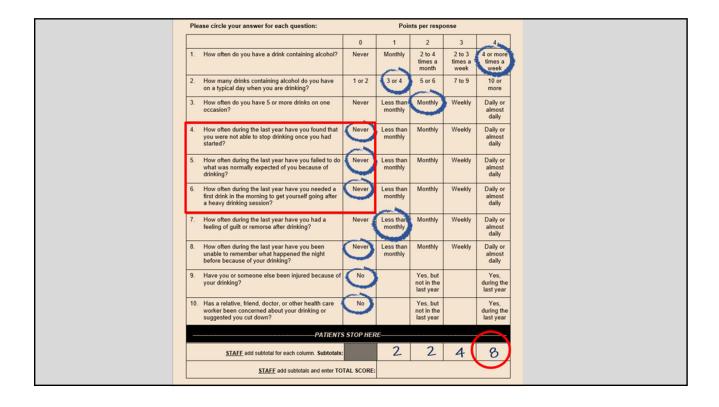
Has a relative, friend, doctor, or another health professional expressed concern about your drinking or suggested you cut down?

#### Audit Total Score



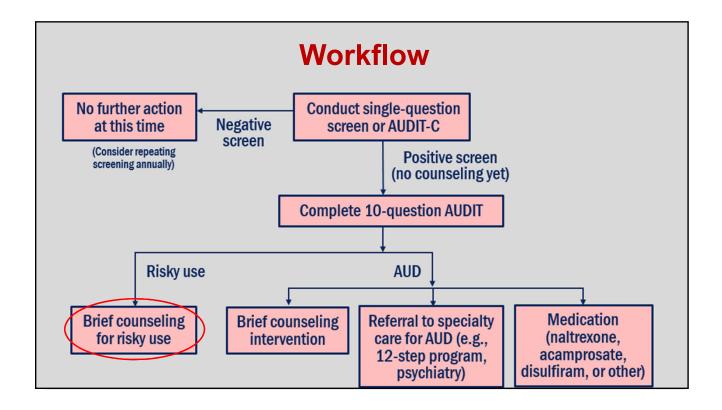
### Case #3

- 48-year-old seeing you for annual preventive health visit
- Completed the AUDIT-C and their score was 7
- What should happen next?



### AUDIT Scoring and Screening-Related Assessment

Men	Women	Review the score from the AUDIT. Use the scale below to help determine disorder vs. risky behave					
<6	<4	Alcohol use disorder unlikely. Proceed with counseling for risky drinking.					
6-14	4-12	Review questions 4-6: If score <2, proceed with counseling for risky drinking. f score ≥2, alcohol use disorder likely. Consider referral.					
≥15	≥13	Alcohol use disorder likely. Consider referral.					
		<ul> <li>How often during the last year have you:</li> <li>4. — found that you were not able to stop drinking once you had started?</li> <li>5. — failed to do what was normally expected from you because of drinking?</li> <li>6. — needed a first drink in the morning to get yourself going after a heavy drinking session?</li> </ul>					



# **Interventions for Unhealthy Alcohol Use**

#### **Risky Drinking**

• Counseling in primary care

#### Alcohol Use Disorder

- Some common treatments
  - Cognitive behavioral therapy
  - Motivational enhancement therapy
  - 12-step programs (e.g., Alcoholics Anonymous)
  - Pharmacotherapy

How Effective Is Counseling?								
Summary of Meta-analysis Results, Primary Drinking Outcomes for Key Question 4a								
Outcome (Effect Measure)	No. of Studies (No. of Effects Analyzed)	No. Participants Analyzed	Pooled Effect (95% CI)	<i>I</i> ², %				
Drinks/wk, Between-Group Difference in Change From Baseline (Weighted Mean Difference)								
Adults	15 (18)	7662	-2.51 (-3.81 to -1.21)	70				
			Ν	NT 7.2 (95% CI, 6.2-11.5) to get 1 adult under				
% Exceeding R	ecommended Dr	inking Limits (Of	र)	recommended limits				
Adults	10 (11)	4964	0.56 (0.49 to 0.65)	14				
% With Heavy Use episodes (OR)								
Adults	6 (7)	3683	0.65 (0.53 to 0.81)	44				
Table adapted	I from following source: O'Cor	nor, Perdue, Senger, Rushki	n, Patnode, Bean, Jonas. JAMA. 2018;320(18):191	0-1928.				

A PROVIDER GUIDE FOR Addressing Unhealthy

**Alcohol Use** 

The 5 A's Approach to Reducing Alcohol Use

Assess current drinking behaviors
Advise on alcohol use

Assist in exploring reasons for change
Agree on options for risk reduction
Arrange follow up

### The 5 A's

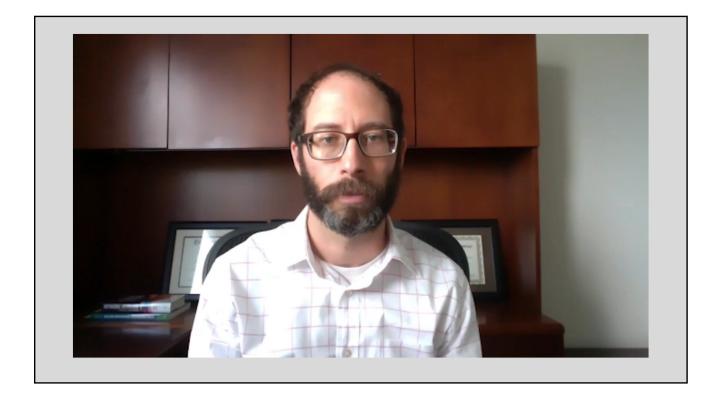
Counseling in Primary Care

- 1. Assess current drinking behaviors
- 2. Advise on alcohol use
- 3. Assist in exploring reasons for change
- 4. Agree on options for risk reduction
- 5. Arrange follow up

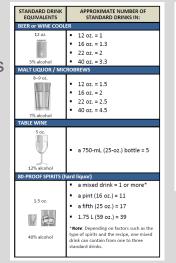


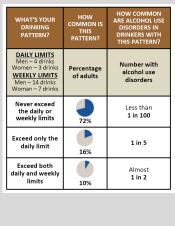
- Ask permission
- Ask open-ended questions
- Make affirmations
- Use reflections
- Use summarizing

- Show respect for the patient's autonomy before starting a conversation or sharing information
- If the patient does most of the talking, the clinician learns more about what matters to the patient
- Statements of appreciation or understanding build rapport and support the patient in change
- Rephrasing statements encourages personal exploration & fuller understanding of motivations
- Enhances mutual understanding of the conversation; spotlights gaps between current situation & future goals



- 1. Assess current drinking behaviors
- 2. Advise on alcohol use





#### 3. Assist

in exploring reasons for change

How important is it to you to change the amount of alcohol you drink?

Not at all		
		Very

Why didn't you rate yourself LOWER? (Why is it important?)

Why didn't you rate yourself HIGHER? (What doubts do you have?)

So, what I heard you say...

How confident are you that you could change the amount of alcohol you drink?

O Not	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not	t at	all								Very

Why didn't you rate yourself LOWER? (Why is it important?)

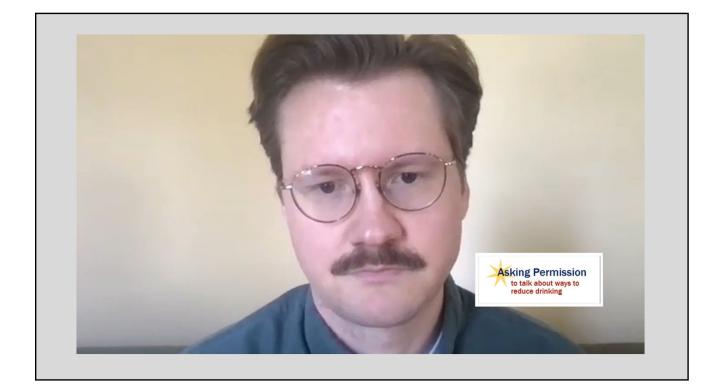
Why didn't you rate yourself HIGHER? (What doubts do you have?)

So, what I heard you say...

### The 5 A's

- 4. Agree on options for risk reduction
- Be ready to:
  - affirm that change can be difficult
  - offer to discuss it again in the future
  - offer options that have helped others
  - a drinking diary can help track consumption and goals

DIARY						
DATE	WINE	BEER	STRONG BEER	LIQUOR	TOTAL # DRINKS	
			WE	EKLY TOTAL		
			WE	EKLY TOTAL		
			WEI	EKLY TOTAL		
			WE	EKLY TOTAL		
_			- MEI	KLY TOTAL		



5. Arrange follow up

At follow-up, if the patient met their goals

- reinforce and support changes
- encourage the patient to return if unable to maintain the agreed-upon changes
- make a note to revisit the topic annually

# 5. Arrange follow up

Be ready to

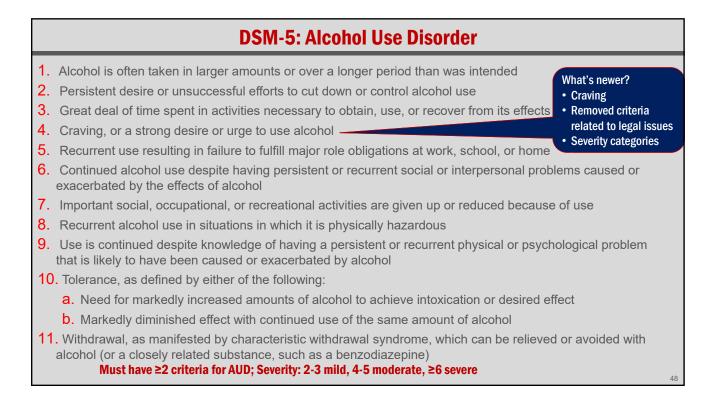
If the patient has not met their goals

- acknowledge that change is difficult
- support positive change and address barriers
- review goals, plans, and strategies, and renegotiate new goals
- assess for other health conditions



### Case #4

- 40-year-old with history of peptic ulcer disease
- Completed the AUDIT-C and score was 9, full AUDIT score was 23
- You diagnose AUD; patient is not surprised
- They reveal that they started seeing a counselor 4 months ago for CBT for "drinking and relationship problems"; minimal to no change in alcohol use so far
- Should you consider starting pharmacotherapy?



### **Interventions for Unhealthy Alcohol Use**

#### **Risky Drinking**

• Counseling in primary care

#### Alcohol Use Disorder

- Some common treatments
  - Cognitive behavioral therapy
  - Motivational enhancement therapy
  - 12-step programs (e.g., Alcoholics Anonymous)
  - Pharmacotherapy



### Tweet

 Naltrexone and acamprosate are effective for preventing lapse (return to drinking) and for reducing consumption for people with alcohol use disorders

51

FDA-approved medications							
Medication	Mechanism	Dosing					
Acamprosate	Thought to modulate hyperactive glutamatergic NMDA receptors	666 mg 3 times per day					
Disulfiram	Inhibits ALDH2, causing accumulation of acetaldehyde during alcohol consumption, which produces a variety of adverse effects such as nausea, dizziness, flushing, and changes in heart rate and blood pressure	250 to 500 mg per day					
Naltrexone	Opioid antagonist; competitively binds to opioid receptors and blocks the effects of endogenous opioids such as β-endorphin	Oral: 50 to 100 mg per day IM injection: 380 mg per month					

### **Applicability**

- Most trials enrolled patients after detoxification or required a period of sobriety (at least 3 days)
- Participants with alcohol dependence (DSM-IV)
  - Raises questions about whether we should consider the meds for mild AUD
- Studies typically included psychosocial co-interventions
  - Effect sizes reflect the added benefits of medications beyond those of psychosocial interventions and placebo

### **Evidence from placebo-controlled trials**

Medication	Outcome	# studies	Total N	Effect size (95% CI)	NNT (95% CI)
Acamprosate	Return to any drinking	20	6380	RR, 0.88 (0.83, 0.93)	11 (1, 32)
	Return to heavy drinking	7	2496	RR, 0.99 (0.94, 1.05)	NA
	% drinking days	14	4916	WMD, -8.3 (-12.2, -4.4)	NA
	% heavy drinking days	2	123	WMD, -3.4 (-6.4, 5.9)	NA
Naltrexone, 50mg/d, oral	Return to any drinking	16	2347	RR, 0.93 (0.87, 0.99)	18 (4, 32)
	Return to heavy drinking	23	3170	RR, 0.81 (0.72, 0.90)	(11 (5, 41))
	% drinking days	15	1992	WMD, -5.1 (-7.2, -3.0)	NA
	% heavy drinking days	7	624	WMD, -4.3 (-7.6, -0.9)	NA

McPheeters, O'Connor, Riley, et al. Pharmacotherapy for alcohol use disorder: a systematic review and meta-analysis. JAMA. 2023;330(17):1653-1665.

### **Contraindications**

- Naltrexone
  - Acute hepatitis or liver failure (precautions for other hepatic disease)
  - Currently using opioids or with anticipated need for opioids
- Acamprosate
  - Severe renal impairment (requires dose adjustments for moderate renal impairment)

### **Common Adverse Effects**

- Naltrexone
  - Dizziness
  - Nausea
  - Vomiting
- Acamprosate
  - Diarrhea

### **Selecting a Medication**

- Head-to-head trials have not consistently established superiority of acamprosate or naltrexone
- Reasons to favor oral naltrexone, unless there is a contraindication
  - Administration frequency
    - Oral naltrexone is once daily
    - Acamprosate is typically two 333mg tablets 3x daily (6 pills/day)
  - Cost (although both relatively low cost, available generic)

### **Off-label**

- Topiramate
  - % Drinking days: WMD, -7.2% (-14.3% to -0.1%), 8 trials, N=1080
  - % Heavy drinking days: WMD, -6.2% (-10.9% to -1.4%), 9 trials, N=1210
  - Drinks per drinking day: WMD, -2.0 (-3.1 to -1.0), 7 trials, N=922

### **Key Points**

- Unhealthy alcohol use is very common and is a leading cause of preventable deaths
- Screening typically best done with brief initial screen (e.g., AUDIT-C) followed by the AUDIT (10 questions) for those with a positive screen
- Brief motivational interviewing can help patients reduce drinking and their risk of health problems from alcohol
- Naltrexone and acamprosate are effective for preventing a return to drinking and for reducing consumption for people with AUD

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