

# Gabapentin (Long term use)

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## How it works:

Gabapentin works similarly to alcohol by calming your nervous system. Using gabapentin to help with drinking has not been approved by Health Canada. Your doctor or nurse is allowed to prescribe it, and this is called “off-label”.

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## What to expect:

- When used as a long-term treatment, it may work better if you start 3 or more days after quitting alcohol (for example, after detox).
  - Some people find that gabapentin works better when combined with therapy, like counselling or mutual support groups (examples: AA or SMART Recovery).
  - Some people find that being self-motivated to quit or cut back, instead of doing it for someone else, can be more successful.
  - You and your health care provider will work together to determine how long to take gabapentin.
  - Speak with your health care provider if you're considering stopping gabapentin. The dose should be reduced gradually to minimize withdrawal symptoms.
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## Dosage:

- For ongoing treatment of alcohol use disorder, gabapentin is taken 3 times a day. The total dose when you start is 300–900mg a day and it gradually increases to 1800mg per day. Some people may take more or less depending on what works for them.
    - Gabapentin comes in multiple strengths (100m, 300mg, 400mg, and 600mg), so you may be prescribed more than one strength to get the right dose for you. Be mindful not to mix up strengths.
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## Side Effects:

- Side effects are usually mild and go away over time.
- Most common: nausea, headache, drowsiness, and dizziness.
- Less common: slurred speech, uncontrolled eye movements, shaking (tremors), weight gain, indigestion, back pain, and reduced kidney functioning.
- Some people experience withdrawal symptoms when stopping gabapentin after taking it long-term.

## Why choose gabapentin?

- Helps reduce heavy drinking.
  - Safe for people with liver disease.
  - Doesn't make you feel sick if you drink while on this medication.
  - No need to switch to a new medication if you've already been on it during detox.
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## Risks:

- Avoid driving, operating dangerous machinery, or doing other activities that require you to be alert and coordinated while taking gabapentin.
  - Gabapentin may not be recommended if:
    - You have a lung or kidney condition (although you may be able to still take it at a lower dose).
    - You have cognitive (brain) impairment.
    - You have a history of severe withdrawal symptoms such as seizures and delirium tremens (DTs).
  - Using it for a long time can lead to an addiction.
    - Using a higher dose than what is prescribed for you can cause pleasurable feelings and over a long time, this can develop into an addiction. Talk to your health care provider if you're concerned about addiction, cravings, or difficulties taking it as prescribed.
    - Quitting gabapentin suddenly after using it for a long time can cause anxiety, insomnia, nausea, pain, and sweating.
  - Some pregnant people have negative effects after taking gabapentin. Talk to your health care provider if you are, become, or are planning to get pregnant or breastfeed.
  - It's unknown whether gabapentin is safe for people who are under 18 or over 65 years old.
  - **WARNING: Mixing gabapentin with other substances that are “downers” (including alcohol and opioids) can slow your breathing or even cause death. For your safety, it's important to talk with your health care provider about what can be mixed safely, including both prescribed and non-prescribed substances. If you're not able to stop using other substances, there are ways to reduce your risk, like not using alone, taking a smaller amount than normal to start, and spacing out your use to avoid mixing substances.**
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## Cost:

Gabapentin is covered in most provinces. Check your plan to find out the details of the cost and coverage.

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