

Table 3**Drugs used to maintain abstinence from alcohol**

Drug	Indication	When to start	Major contraindications
Acamprosate	Maintenance of abstinence; can reduce cravings for alcohol	As soon as possible after detoxification. Usually prescribed for up to 6 months, or longer if there is a benefit and patient preference	Renal impairment
Naltrexone	Relapse prevention	After detoxification. Usually prescribed for up to 6 months, or longer if there is a benefit and patient preference	Current treatment with opiate analgesics (as will render these ineffective and precipitate withdrawal); hepatic failure; acute hepatitis
Disulfiram	Disulfiram is an alternative for patients in whom acamprosate and naltrexone are not suitable, or if the patient prefers disulfiram and understands the risks of taking the drug. Maintenance of abstinence; ensure patient understands risks of drinking while on this medication (induces disulfiram-ethanol reaction); and also knows to avoid certain toiletries which contain alcohol	At least 24 hours after the last alcoholic drink	Significant cognitive impairment (which would preclude understanding/recall of risks of concurrent alcohol use); cardiac failure; coronary artery disease; history of stroke; hypertension