

# Anticonvulsants for Ambulatory Alcohol Withdrawal Management

## MAT and Withdrawal Management

This guidance was developed for a quarantine/isolation (QI) sites for people experiencing homelessness who are diagnosed with COVID-19 or symptomatic pending testing results, and these sites are staffed with more nursing and a prescribing clinician during the daytime, although this staffing isn't sufficient to do vitals with any regularity (even as frequently q4H).

### ALCOHOL USE DISORDER MANAGEMENT

For all patients with alcohol use disorder (including those who are actively drinking) and for those patients experiencing alcohol withdrawal:

1. Screen for any opioid use (ask if the patient is using any heroin, fentanyl, or narcotic pain medications from any source). If they are, *do not start naltrexone*. If they don't:
2. Screen for severe cirrhosis characterized by significant jaundice and/or ascites. If they have this, *do not start naltrexone*. If they don't:
3. Start oral naltrexone (25mg daily x3d, then increase to 50mg daily) since this can help patients reduce their alcohol consumption or sustain alcohol abstinence in QI sites. Start naltrexone as soon as is feasible and concurrently with withdrawal management.
4. Do not give naltrexone to patients who are using or withdrawing from opioids and do not give naltrexone to patients with severe cirrhosis characterized by significant jaundice and/or ascites unless directed by the MAT consultation line or the addiction medicine consultation service.

### ALCOHOL / BENZODIAZEPINE / BARBITURATE WITHDRAWAL MANAGEMENT

Provide the following for alcohol / sedative withdrawal management, if the patients reports experiencing alcohol / sedative withdrawal. Any clinicians, providers, or staff member unfamiliar with alcohol and sedative withdrawal can find the symptoms of this withdrawal [here](#), but a formal SAWS or CIWA does not need to be administered or completed prior to offering patients alcohol / sedative withdrawal management.

For mild-to-moderate<sup>1</sup> and low-risk<sup>2</sup> patients with alcohol /sedative withdrawal syndrome:

Gabapentin is first line; carbamazepine can be used in patients who do not tolerate gabapentin. Escalate from gabapentin to chlordiazepoxide or lorazepam if the patient exhibits severe withdrawal symptoms that are not addressed by the gabapentin protocol below.

In QI sites, the patient can be furnished the entire taper of gabapentin (#30 of the 600mg tabs) or carbamazepine (#30 of the 200mg) with instructions on how to take it.

**Gabapentin is dosed as 600mg PO TID plus an additional 600mg prn once daily for the first week, followed by a 300mg taper after the first week**

Taper schedule:

Days	Gabapentin Monotherapy (fixed schedule dosing)
1	1,200mg BID plus 1,200mg x1 prn
2-7	600mg TID plus 600mg x1 prn

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8	300mg TID
9	300mg BID
10	300mg qday

How to write the prescription:

*Rx: Gabapentin 600mg tabs, take as directed, #30, NR*

Verbalized or printed instructions for the patient:

Day 1: Take 2 tabs twice daily plus an additional 2 tabs if needed the first day

Days 2-7: Take 1 tab three times daily plus an additional 1 tabs if needed

Day 8: Take ½ tab three times daily

Day 9: Take ½ tab twice daily

Day 10: Take ½ tab once at bedtime

**Carbamazepine is dosed 200mg PO QID x 72<sup>h</sup> followed by a 200mg reduction q72<sup>h</sup>**

Taper schedule:

Days	Carbamazepine Monotherapy (fixed schedule dosing)
1-3	200mg QID
4-6	200mg TID
7-9	200mg BID
10-11	200mg qHS

How to write the prescription:

*Rx Carbamazepine 200mg tabs, take 1 QID x3d, then 1 TIDx3d, then 1 BID x3d, then 1 qHS x3d, #30, NR*

Verbalized or printed instructions for the patient:

Days 1-3: Take 1 four times throughout the day

Days 4-6: Take 1 three times throughout the day

Days 7-9: Take 1 twice a day

Days 10-11: Take 1 at bedtime

For patients with a history of severe alcohol/sedative withdrawal and in patients that do not respond to gabapentin or carbamazepine:

**For those without severe cirrhosis characterized by significant jaundice and/or ascites:**

**Chlordiazepoxide 50mg QID x4doses for Day 1, then 25mg QID x8 doses for Days 2-3, then d/c chlordiazepoxide. Hold if the pt is sedated or asleep.**

In QI sites, visit patients experiencing significant alcohol withdrawal no less frequently than twice daily and hand the patient two of that day's dose (so two doses per dispensing visit to the patient). If the

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patient calls and indicates ongoing withdrawal that hasn't responded to 100mg of chlordiazepoxide within two hours, then give the patient additional doses as per the below:

For ongoing withdrawal (see SAWS if unfamiliar but a SAWS does not need to be administered or completed prior to additional dosing), then they get **another 50mg q6H prn**. Don't exceed 400mg of chlordiazepoxide in 24 hours (some patients may need more than this, but >400mg of chlordiazepoxide suggests someone may need to be monitored in a hospital)

**For those with severe cirrhosis characterized by significant jaundice and/or ascites:**

**Lorazepam 2mg QID x4doses for Day 1, then 1mg QID x8 doses for Days 2-3, then d/c lorazepam. Hold if the pt is sedated or asleep.**

In QI sites, visit patients experiencing significant alcohol withdrawal no less frequently than twice daily and hand the patient two of that day's dose (so two doses per dispensing visit to the patient). If the patient calls and indicates ongoing withdrawal that hasn't responded to 4mg of lorazepam within two hours, then give the patient additional doses as per the below:

For ongoing withdrawal (see SAWS if unfamiliar but a SAWS does not need to be administered or completed prior to additional dosing), then they get **another 2mg q3H prn**. Don't exceed 14mg of lorazepam in 24 hours (some patients may need more than this, but >14mg of lorazepam suggests someone may need to be monitored in a hospital)

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## OPIOID USE DISORDER AND WITHDRAWAL MANAGEMENT

For opioid use disorder and opioid withdrawal:

**Buprenorphine / Naloxone 8mg/2mg, give the patient 1 tab to take sublingually q2H if the patient reports opioid withdrawal.** For those with a low opioid habit or low opioid tolerance, okay to split the tab in 1/2 and given 4mg/1mg q2H rather than the full 8mg/2mg. Once the patient stabilizes on a dose, continue to offer them that dose as a maintenance treatment. Buprenorphine / Naloxone is best used as a maintenance medication where the patient takes the dose they need (usually 8mg/2mg, 16mg/4mg or 24mg/6mg) daily.

At QI sites: Dispense #28 of the buprenorphine / naloxone tabs to the patient at one time with instructions on how to take it. Ongoing visits are only needed for opioid withdrawal management if the patient has questions or isn't responding to the treatment, or needs a refill.

If there is a question about whether the patient is in opioid withdrawal, providers, clinicians, and other staff can refer to the SOWS, but a SOWS or COWS not need to be administered or completed prior to offering patients opioid withdrawal management.

## TOBACCO USE DISORDER AND NICOTINE WITHDRAWAL

- Nicotine patches 14mg once a day
- Nicotine lozenges 2mg five times daily

The protocol is to assess how much someone is smoking, and match (1mg of nicotine = 1 cigarette)

The dose of the patches to match the usual number of cigarettes per day. Place the patch in the morning and take off at bedtime, since it can cause nightmares. The lozenges are q1H prn for smoking urges.

At QI sites: Dispense two week's worth of patches (#14 or more for heavy smokers) and two week's worth of lozenges (1 box, typically 72) to each patient with tobacco use disorders who want to accept this treatment. Ongoing visits are only needed for nicotine withdrawal management if the patient has questions or isn't responding to the treatment, or needs a refill.

## ANXIETY / AGITATION

For those without severe cirrhosis characterized by significant jaundice and/or ascites:

Give clordiazepoxide 50mg q6H prn

For those with severe cirrhosis characterized by significant jaundice and/or ascites:

Give lorazepam 1-2mg q3H prn

# Anticonvulsants for Ambulatory Alcohol Withdrawal Management

## References:

### [ASAM Alcohol Withdrawal National Practice Guideline](#)

American Society of Addiction Medicine (2020). ASAM Guideline on Alcohol Withdrawal Management. <http://www.asam.org/Quality-Science/quality/guideline-on-alcohol-withdrawal-management> -

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Malcolm, R., Ballenger, J. C., Sturgis, E. T., & Anton, R. (1989). Double-blind controlled trial comparing carbamazepine to oxazepam treatment of alcohol withdrawal. *The American journal of psychiatry*. 1989 May;146(5):617-21 <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/2653057>

Barrons, R., & Roberts, N. (2010). The role of carbamazepine and oxcarbazepine in alcohol withdrawal syndrome. *Journal of clinical pharmacy and therapeutics*, 35(2), 153-167. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/20456734>

Hammond, C. J., Niciu, M. J., Drew, S., & Arias, A. J. (2015). Anticonvulsants for the treatment of alcohol withdrawal syndrome and alcohol use disorders. *CNS drugs*, 29(4), 293-311. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5759952>

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<sup>1</sup> SAWS of  $\leq 16$  is mild to moderate withdrawal (see <http://www.aafp.org/afp/2013/1101/afp20131101p589-f2.gif> in <http://www.aafp.org/afp/2013/1101/p589.html> )

<sup>2</sup> Patients are not appropriate for outpatient alcohol withdrawal management if they have any one of the following characteristics, unless directed by addiction medicine team or attending supervisor:

- History of delirium tremens or withdrawal seizures
- Acute illness that requires inpatient management
- Severe cognitive impairment (acute or chronic) that prevents ability of patient to take medication or follow instructions
- Inability to take oral medications because of vomiting or swallowing issues
- Serious psychiatric condition requiring a higher level of care
- Pregnancy – unless directed by high risk OB team
- Severe alcohol withdrawal symptoms ([SAWS > 16 or CIWA-Ar  \$\geq 20\$](#) )

For tobacco use disorder, I'd recommend:

- Nicotine patches 14mg
- Nicotine lozenges 2mg

The protocol is to assess how much someone is smoking, and match (1mg of nicotine = 1 cigarette) the dose of the patches to match the usual number of cigarettes per day. Place the patch in the morning and take off at bedtime, since it can cause nightmares. The lozenges are q1H prn for smoking urges.

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Also, for patients in alcohol withdrawal (or even those who are actively drinking):  
Naltrexone 50mg daily

The protocol is to start oral naltrexone (25mg daily x3d, then increase to 50mg daily) since this can help patients reduce their alcohol consumption or sustain alcohol abstinence in iso/quarantine settings.

For those with functional livers:

Chlordiazepoxide 50mg QID x4doses for Day 1, then 25mg QID x8 doses for Days 2-3, then d/c chlordiazepoxide . Hold if the pt is sedated or asleep.

If SAWS (see attached) is >12, then they get another 50mg q6H prn. Don't exceed 400mg of Chlordiazepoxide in 24 hours (some patients may need more than this, but >400mg chlordiazepoxide suggests someone may need to be monitored in a hospital)

For those without functional livers:

Lorazepam 2mg QID x4doses for Day 1, then 1mg QID x8 doses for Days 2-3, then d/c lorazepam. Hold if the pt is sedated or asleep.

If SAWS (see attached) is >12, then they get another 1mg q3H prn. Don't exceed 14mg of Lorazepam in 24 hours (some patients may need more than this, but >14mg lorazepam suggests someone may need to be monitored in a hospital)

For opioid withdrawal:

Buprenorphine / Naloxone 8mg/2mg, give 1 strip q2H prn opioid withdrawal (if there is a question about whether the pt is in withdrawal it's okay to use the SOWS [http://www.asam.org/docs/default-source/education-docs/sows\\_8-28-2017.pdf](http://www.asam.org/docs/default-source/education-docs/sows_8-28-2017.pdf) rather than COWS, and a positive score is a SOWS score of >10), NTE 24mg/6mg in 24 hours. Don't hold if the patient reports that they are in opioid withdrawal (even if you don't have a SOWS score). Best used as a maintenance medication where the pt takes the dose they need (usually 8mg/2mg, 16mg/4mg or 24mg/6mg) daily. For those with a low opioid habit or low tolerance, okay to split the tab in 1/2 and given 4mg/1mg q2H rather than the full 8mg/2mg.

For anxiety / agitation:

Give chlordiazepoxide 50mg q6H prn or lorazepam 1-2mg q3H prn (depending on liver function)