

Colibrí Wellness Center

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LOW DOSE NALTREXONE PATIENT INSTRUCTIONS

Prescription Medication: Low dose naltrexone, 1.5mg tablets. This is a compounded medication through a local or mail order pharmacy of your choosing. I typically recommend Prescription Lab Compounding Pharmacy, and their phone number is 520-886-1035.

Instructions for use: Take 1-3 tablets at bed, 1-4 days per week (continuous time period) with a 3 day rest period each week. For example, take the dose Monday through Thursday, and not on Friday through Sunday. It is ok to change the days to accommodate your schedule needs based on how this medication affects you.

The goal of this therapy is to trigger your body to make more endorphins. This is somewhat complicated so please read this handout so that you have a better understanding of how to manage this medication yourself. Naltrexone is a pharmaceutical medication that blocks the opioid receptor, with its most common use in opioid overdose in emergency medicine and is also used at a dose of 25-50mg for treatment of active opioid addiction.

Low dose naltrexone (1.5-4.5mg) is used very differently for very different treatment goals of balancing immune system function, enhancing repair mechanisms, and dramatically reducing inflammatory and painful symptoms. First discovered in 1979, the low dose application of naltrexone has potential for stimulating production of our body's natural opioids, called endorphins, which have extremely powerful disease modifying effects.

How does naltrexone work? Why is it important to “pulse” the therapy?

To understand how it works is to comprehend a remarkable insight into how the body actually “cures” illness. Endorphins are the chemicals in our brain that provide dramatically immediate pain relief and improvement in muscle strength. In the 1970s endorphins were discovered and shown to enhance wound healing and regulate cancer cell growth.

Naltrexone works to temporarily block the amount of endorphins our body detects, which triggers the body to produce more endorphins. The concept is similar to weight training for building muscles. By adding weight to muscle effort in weight training, the muscle tissue adapts and grows more strength to compensate. The same can be said for endorphins, because by using naltrexone to block the body's detection of endorphins this “extra weight” causes an adaptive mechanism to **produce more endorphins.**

And just like in weight training, it takes time for the body to adapt and compensate, requiring time to “rest” in between training sessions. This method of pulsing naltrexone is recommended as gentler and more effective for stimulating rapid endorphin production. The instructions below specify **only taking the medication for 1-4 days per week** (until you know how it affects you) in a regular treatment window, ideally the same 4 day window each week.

Some patients later can take this more often, such as everyday or perhaps 5-6 days per week, depending on the treatment goals and the body's response to therapy. Please contact Dr. Vose for more specific information about how to suit your body's needs.

Have questions or need help managing this therapy? Please reach out to Dr. Vose directly at:

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What does the research say?

The first research published on low dose naltrexone (1983) showed that this therapy reduces cancer cell proliferation. At the same time it was discovered to enhance wound healing. In 1985 low dose naltrexone use was expanded to include multiple sclerosis and by 2007 thousands of autoimmune patients had been successfully treated with low dose naltrexone, and the first clinical trial paper was published on its success in treating the autoimmune inflammatory bowel disease known as Crohn's disease.

Later published trials demonstrated benefits in fibromyalgia patients with dramatic reductions in specific inflammatory markers. Most recently, neuropathy, chronic pain, and many other disorders have research supporting the use of low dose naltrexone for. The clinical applications are expanding and this safe therapy may be added to your treatment strategy for a variety of reasons.

What are the ultimate goals of therapy? What does long-term success look like?

The ultimate goal of therapy is to achieve a dose that produces a positive feeling and general reduction in symptoms of disease and abnormal values in laboratory testing. Once this occurs the next goal is to gradually discontinue the medication while maintaining disease remission using lifestyle and other naturopathic treatment strategies.

This usually takes at the very least 1 month of therapy, but typically low dose naltrexone therapy must be maintained for at least 6 months. Surprisingly, sometimes patients feel improvements after even just 1 week of therapy. The absolute maximum dose of naltrexone in this therapy is 10mg, but typically 4.5mg is the maximum dose used in clinical practice. Some patients never reach 4.5mg and those sensitive to medications in general may find that a lower dose of even 1.5mg is suitable for long-term maintenance.

IMPORTANT: WHAT TO EXPECT

As you start the therapy and each time you increase your dose, you may expect to experience symptoms of low endorphins though most of the time patients do not notice much. Symptoms of low endorphins may include temporarily unrestful sleep, restlessness during sleep, changes in your sleep cycle such as difficulty staying asleep, vivid or unpleasant dreams, and rarely a temporary mild increase in pain. **If symptoms worsen when starting therapy or increasing your dose, please skip the following 1-2 nights before taking another dose.**

For example, if you start or increase your dose at the beginning of the week on a Monday and experience these symptoms, do not resume your dose until Wednesday or Thursday (skipping Tuesday and possibly Wednesday). Alternatively if you are very sensitive to these symptoms, please skip the rest of the week and take a dose only the following Monday.

Never take a dose inside the three day window “rest period” in order to allow your body to adapt to the medication by increasing the production of endorphins.

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Instructions: How to start

While sometimes patients do well taking low dose naltrexone every night, the most effective prescription in naturopathic medicine is when taken 1-4 days per week (during the 4-day “treatment period”). The ideal treatment dose and schedule depends on many factors based on each patient’s individuality. When starting therapy please consider your general sensitivity to medications and therapies and the severity of your symptoms relative to your ability to tolerate possible side effects. Other medications and therapies are useful for ensuring restful sleep while taking low dose naltrexone. These are described at the end of this handout.

Week 1: 4-day treatment period only (example: Monday through Thursday) - take 1.5mg at bedtime, using sleep supportive therapies as needed to aid in restful sleep. If you experience unmanageable and undesirable side effects it is ok to skip 1-2 days between doses. Do not take a dose outside of the predetermined 4-day treatment period each week.

Week 2 and afterwards: 4-day treatment period per week: if you can tolerate an increase in dose it is ok to increase the dose to 3mg for 1-4 days per week. If you experience symptoms please consider either skipping 1-2 days of therapy altogether or simply reducing the dose back to 1.5mg the rest of the 4-day treatment period.

Week 3 and afterwards: 4-day treatment period per week: if you can tolerate an increase in dose it is ok to increase the dose to 4.5mg for 1-4 days per week. If you experience symptoms please consider either skipping 1-2 days of therapy altogether or simply reducing the dose back to 3mg or 1.5mg the rest of the 4-day treatment period.

Long term use varies: Some patients take naltrexone on a 5-7 days per week period. This may look like: Monday through Thursday taking 4.5mg at bed, and Friday through Sunday taking 1.5-3mg at bed. Most patients adjust the dose to fit how they feel, and Dr. Vose is available to help you manage your dose. Please contact him directly at DrVose@colibriwellnesscenter.com

RESOURCES FOR MORE INFORMATION

There are a lot of published scientific research studies and a variety of websites that can explain even more about how this therapy works and what diseases have been shown to benefit from. Please contact Dr. Vose for any requests for more specific information.

www.lowdosenaltrexone.org

www.ldnresearchtrust.org/what-is-ldn

www.naturalmedicinejournal.com/journal/2018-04/uses-low-dose-naltrexone-clinical-practice

2014 Low dose naltrexone for chronic pain: www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3962576/

2013 Low dose naltrexone for fibromyalgia: www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/23359310

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Sleep Support: Things to try

If you are experiencing difficulty with sleep you may be recommended some of the following therapies. Please look over this list and consider which therapies you may be willing to try.

Basics for sleep:

- Avoid bright lights and screens (TV, computer, tablet, etc.) at least 2 hours before bed
- Pets often must be moved to another room as these commonly interrupt sleep
- Only using the bed for sleeping, and if you are not able to sleep after 10mins go to another room for another activity such as reading and try to sleep later.
- Exercise during the day, and not after 8pm
- Sun exposure during the day, such as 30mins spent outdoors in partial sun
- Full spectrum light therapy (10,000 lux) for 15mins when rising in the morning, such as during eating breakfast (helps to set circadian rhythm and sleep the following night)
- Avoid alcoholic drinks after 7pm, as these commonly interrupt sleep around 12-3am

Gentle therapies or over the counter medications to consider:

- Natural Vitality, Calmful Sleep: 1-2 tsp in liquid at bed time (buy at Sprouts, etc.)
- Epsom salt bath for restlessness: 2 cups epsom salt in a very hot bath for 40mins
- 5-HTP: 100mg 20 minutes before bed
- L-theanine: 200mg at bed
- Melatonin: 1-3mg, while most people take this 15mins prior to bed, consider taking this 6 hrs prior to desired bedtime if it makes you groggy in the morning or does not work when taken 15mins before bed.
- Celestial Seasonings, Sleepytime Tea: 1 tea bag steeped in water, at bed
- Contrast hydrotherapy: Take a shower with alternating warm (2mins) and room temperature to cold (20 seconds), alternating 3 times ending on room temperature/cold to trigger your autonomic nervous system to enter "rest and digest" mode.
- Neutral bath: Spend 15-30 mins in a bath at room temperature for calming nervousness and hyperactivity of the mind

Stronger herbal medications and prescriptions to consider:

- Kavinace by NeuroScience: 1-2 caps at bed and again on waking
- Kava Kava by Gaia: 4-8 capsules at bedtime
- Passionflower tincture: 2-5 droppersfull in water swished around in the mouth for 2 mins
- Nutmeg: ½ - 3 teaspoons in a little hot coconut milk (or other liquid) at 7-8pm. Start this therapy with ½ teaspoon and increase by ½ teaspoon daily until desired effect. This therapy has been used for thousands of years in Ayurvedic medicine to stay asleep. It takes anywhere from 2-5 hours to have a sedative effect, and then it lasts upto 8 hours.
- Progesterone (non-habit forming Rx): take as prescribed
- Doxepin (non-habit forming Rx): take as prescribed
- Oxytocin (non-habit forming Rx): take as prescribed

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