

What is Disulfiram (Antabuse)?

Disulfiram (Antabuse) is a chemical which acts as a deterrent to alcohol consumption. When taken as a tablet, it generally produces no reaction at all in a healthy person. If that person then takes alcohol in any form, even in small quantities, the disulfiram and alcohol interact in the body producing a harmful compound. Since one dose of disulfiram may last some days, a person who has taken it will almost certainly suffer a very serious physical reaction should he/she drink alcohol within the next week.

Medical Use

Disulfiram is prescribed for patients having difficulty in controlling their intake of alcohol. Taken daily it makes it very dangerous for the patient to drink on impulse: alcohol can be taken only after a decision is made to stop the tablets, and then only after seven days - which gives plenty of time for second thoughts.

Forbidden substances

All alcoholic drinks, food prepared with wine, vinegar, sauces and medications containing alcohol, eg some cough syrups, aftershave lotions and alcoholic backrubs. Paraldehyde, metronidazole (Flagyl), Phenytoin, anticoagulants (blood thinners) and isoniazid also interact with Antabuse.

What happens In the reaction

There is usually intense flushing from the head downwards involving the face, eyes, arms and chest; it is accompanied by sweating and a sensation of heat. There is a pounding headache and palpitation followed by constriction and irritation of the throat with coughing and difficulty in breathing. There may be pains in the chest and restlessness and a fear of dying may develop. While these symptoms are being experienced the blood pressure rises steeply and then falls profoundly to a very low level. The flushing is then replaced by pallor, and there is nausea with vomiting and abdominal cramps. other reported symptoms include thirst, dizziness, blurred vision, numbness of hands, feet and insomnia.

Severe reactions may affect the heart, and there may be convulsions, loss of consciousness, and death from failure of the cardiac and respiratory systems

There is some individual reaction, but generally the reaction is proportional to the amount of disulfiram and alcohol taken.

Mild reactions may occur in the sensitive individual when the blood alcohol concentration is increased to as little as .005 to .010 g/100 ml. Symptoms are fully developed at .05 g/100 ml (the level at which driving is forbidden) and unconsciousness usually results when the blood alcohol level reaches .125 to .150 g/100 ml. The duration of the reaction varies from two to four hours to several hours in more severe cases.

Precautions

If the patient has any of the below:

- diabetes mellitus
- hypothyroidism
- epilepsy
- kidney disease
- advanced liver disease
- chorea disease
- pregnancy
- asthma

medical supervision is necessary, and due thought would have to be given before disulfiram is advised. While the medication is being taken, you should see your doctor from time to time for a check-up, and so that he can have tests done which ensure that no complications are arising. If you have any of the illnesses mentioned above, make sure that you have told the doctor about them.

Adverse reactions

In ordinary doses disulfiram produces few side effects. Very occasionally at low dosage, but more often at a higher dosage, the administration of disulfiram can produce drowsiness, tiredness, confusion and pins and needles or weakness in the limbs. When therapy is first started there can be headache, rash, stomach upset, impotence or a garlic-like taste in the mouth. Such symptoms usually disappear spontaneously. Rarely eye pain, mood and mental changes (psychotic reaction) have been reported.

Special precaution

It is very dangerous to administer Antabuse to a person without his or her knowledge. Similarly, it is extremely dangerous to give alcohol to a person taking Antabuse without the person's knowledge.

If you are prescribed Disulfiram, you will be required to sign a form, confirming you have read this information, and waiving any liability on the Doctor, or Applied Recovery Co. if you take alcohol or another forbidden substance whilst taking Disulfiram.

The information has been prepared to answer some of the common questions you may have about Disulfiram.

If you have a concern about any medicine you are taking, you should always consult your doctor or pharmacist.