

**- The FFA Method™ Medications Guide -**



**Michael Pearlman, M.D.**



# The FFA Method™ Medications Guide

## Alcohol Craving Medications Overview

These medications, dosages and suggested usages are not meant as guidelines to treatment – they are only presented to give you some idea of the paths alcohol craving treatment may take. Please understand that we will go over these medications in detail and step by step so we can develop the best 'protocol' for your situation.

### Prescription Medications

In most cases, I will use the following medications:

- Naltrexone (oral), Vivitrol (I.M. depot naltrexone) - naltrexone, an opiate-receptor blocker, is FDA approved to treat alcohol craving and alcoholism.
- Campral (acamprosate) - is FDA approved to treat alcohol craving and alcoholism.
- Baclofen - ordinarily used to treat skeletal-muscle spasticity - 'open-label' use found to help with alcohol craving and withdrawal

### Here are additional medications suggested and used today in the treatment of alcohol craving:

- Topamax (topiramate) - used to treat migraine headache and seizure disorders - 'open-label' use found to help with alcohol craving and withdrawal
- Chantix (varenicline) - recently approved by the FDA to support smoking cessation - 'open-label' use found to help with alcohol craving and withdrawal
- Zofran (ondansetron) - currently used to treat nausea associated with chemo-therapy - 'open-label' use was found to help with alcohol craving and withdrawal symptoms. I have not prescribed Zofran (ondansetron), however, good results have been recorded, beginning with small doses and increasing the dose as tolerated and positive results observed. One problem with Zofran (ondansetron) is its cost. Please note that this is a suggested protocol and not meant to be relied upon by an individual patient – please consult your treating physician in all cases.

With respect to prescription medications, my clinical approach is usually as follows:

In general, after a medical and psychiatric assessment, to determine among other things whether a detoxification period is in order – A Librium

(chlordiazepoxide) taper may be recommended and prescribed. A taper is the gradual increase or decrease in medication subject to a patient's safety, comfort and medication effectiveness. If I do prescribe Librium on an out-patient basis, I make myself more available to monitor that taper process.

### **My Suggestions for Using Naltrexone, Campral (Acamprosate) and Baclofen**

If the Librium taper goes well or was not prescribed, I usually suggest starting with a 'package' of naltrexone, Campral and baclofen as well as OTC supplements. I'll discuss and educate you about how to use these medications, and have on-going contact to address side effects if any, effectiveness, dosage adjustments and other guidance.

I prescribe Campral and naltrexone together as they seem to work better in combination than separately, along with baclofen, ordinarily. Campral is gradually taken to a daily dose of 2 tablets 3 xs per day. It works by smoothing out the 'waves' of 'body chemicals' such as glutamine, etc. associated with drinking which produces cravings. I usually recommend naltrexone; which works on blocking the reinforcement of craving - only taken prior to drinking. Baclofen seems to work in a similar way to naltrexone.

In general: as a rule take the baclofen 1 hour prior to drinking, just like naltrexone and you may take it with your naltrexone dose. Initially, try the baclofen daily 1/2 tablet 3 times a day for several days and then go to 1 tablet 3 times a day. After 4 - 6 weeks (or so) go to the 'just prior to drinking dose plan' – 1 tablet (10mg.). In any event you will find and use what works 'best' for you under my guidance.

#### **Patient Comment**

"Baclofen diminishes the intensity of alcohol craving and has a subtle calming effect..." C.G.

All three are excellent and usually 'safe' medications when taken as directed. There are many approaches in using these medications.

You can see more comments about baclofen in these blog posts:

[Baclofen](#)

[Baclofen vis-à-vis Alcohol Cravings and Withdrawal](#)

Again, in general, baclofen has a lesser side effect profile than Topamax and is usually very well tolerated. My patients and I have been delighted with the comfort, acceptability and relative effectiveness of baclofen.

### More On Side Effects

Baclofen, naltrexone, Campral and Topamax do indeed, have some side effects, and, in general, I advise people to start with very low doses for several days and only when comfortable should they gradually increase dosages. For those that have persistent side effects from their medications (baclofen, naltrexone, Campral or Topamax) I often recommend they take a fraction of the pill for several evenings prior to bed - with Campral, just one pill. If this lowered dosage is tolerable, it should continue over several nights and only very gradually increase the dosages to allow desensitization. Of course, this is best done when the medication offers some hope of being effective and there is not indeed a true allergic reaction.

I may suggest Topamax (topiramate) as a 'second stage' medication, if needed, as its higher side effect profile is more challenging than the other three (baclofen, Campral & naltrexone). Topamax (topiramate) may produce some cognitive impairment. In all cases, taking prescription medications requires monitoring on a regular basis by your prescribing physician.

### **Over The Counter - OTC Supplements and Dosing**

OTC medications and supplements (A doctor's prescription is not needed - however, your physician should guide you) may prove helpful in alcohol recovery and are credited with relieving certain withdrawal symptoms.

#### 1. Multi Vitamins/Minerals Supplement

I recommend Kirkland Signature™ Mature Multi Vitamins & Minerals. It contains all the necessary vitamins and minerals for alcohol recovery and rejuvenation.

Suggested Use: As a dietary supplement, take 1 tablet daily, preferably with food.

#### 2. B-50 Formula Promotes Energy

I recommend Kirkland Signature™ B-50 Hi-Energy Complex 350 Tablets. The B-50 Formula contains a combination of B-vitamins which help convert food into energy and are necessary for normal functioning of the nervous system. For alcohol recovery the B-50 Formula should contain all essential B-Vitamins that were diminished during the heavy drinking period. Early on in the alcohol cessation program participants need this extra assistance.

Suggested Use: As a dietary supplement, take 1 - 2 tablets daily, preferably with food.

### 3. Milk Thistle/Silymarin

I recommend Now Foods, Silymarin/Milk Thistle Extract, 2x-300 mg, 100 Vcaps

Description: Supports Liver Function -An Herbal Dietary Supplement  
Silymarin (*Silybum marianum*), also known as Milk Thistle, is an herb that is well documented in early traditional herbal medicine. Studies abroad and in the U.S. have indicated the constituents in Silymarin may help support healthy liver function. *Silybum marianum*, milk thistle is an herb well known for favorable effects on the liver which principally acts as a filtering system for removing alcohol from the body. Its primary function reduces damaging free radical activity and liver enzymes linked with too much alcohol consumption.

Milk Thistle/Silymarin: 300 mg. allows higher single dosage, so you need only take it once or twice a day instead of three times; this depends on whether or not you continue to drink.

Suggested Use: As an herbal dietary supplement, take 1 Vcaps® 1 to 3 times daily.

### 4. Magnesium Citrate

I recommend Now Foods, Magnesium Citrate, 200 mg, 250 Tablets.

Description: A Dietary Supplement

Magnesium Citrate is produced from the synthesis of Magnesium Carbonate and Citric Acid and is a readily bioavailable source of this key mineral. It plays key roles in the activation of amino acids for protein biosynthesis and is highly concentrated in intracellular fluid and bone. Magnesium Citrate is more easily digested and better absorbed than other forms of magnesium.

Suggested Use: as a dietary supplement, take one or two tablets daily, preferably with meals. May be taken at bed to enhance sleep.

### 5. Kudzu

I recommend Planetary Herbals, Full Spectrum Kudzu, 750 mg, 120 Tablets

Description: Anti-Alcohol Support - Herbal Supplement

Lifestyle Recommendations: For additional anti-alcohol support, maintain adequate blood sugar levels through proper diet. Avoid simple sugars, consume adequate protein, and exercise regularly.

For centuries the Chinese have known that kudzu had the ability to curb the compulsion to drink. It also has the added bonus of offering other benefits unrelated to alcohol treatment. Formulating kudzu dosages have been a challenge and may vary among users. It is without a doubt the most effective natural supplement for curbing alcohol craving and withdrawal. Getting the dosage correct is important for this reason.

It is recommended that taken in combination with anti craving medications a dose of 750 mg. per day is sufficient but taken on its own which some program participants are want to do, there is anecdotal evidence that a dose of up to 3000 mg. per day may prove effective in reducing cravings in those individuals being treated. Individual experiences may vary and how you react to the medication will best guide your dosing regimen.

You may try to gradually work your way up to the maximum dosage starting at around 750 mg. per day and increasing as necessary according to your needs. Due to a lack of organized research it is difficult to have an exact dosage that would be effective so we adjust levels accordingly. Patients with endometriosis, reproductive cancers, diabetes, women who are pregnant or breast feeding and people with diabetes we caution, kudzu may have adverse side effects or contraindications in these individuals and so they should refrain from using kudzu until further study proves safety.

patient comments

"Kudzu and the whole vitamin regimen seem to be working. In general I feel better and notice less of a swing if I do drink."

"In general I feel better, the supplements evens my mood in a good way - I consistently feel better, don't go into spiral of negativity and it's easier to come back to focus on - I don't want to drink." C.G.

There is every indication that kudzu usage is safe (other than for those individuals mentioned above) and remember that the Chinese herbalists have been using it for hundreds of years and that says something. However we prefer to err on the side of caution. Many kudzu users continue to take the supplement long after the need to curb cravings has ceased. They derive other benefits from its use and it has been known to prevent bone loss, improve memory and reduce cholesterol though additional study is necessary. Diabetics need to exercise caution since studies have shown kudzu can lower blood sugar levels so monitoring blood levels is critically important.

The active ingredients for alcohol recovery in kudzu are considered to be the isoflavanoids. The three important isoflavanoids are: puerarin, daidzin (4%) and daidzein (2%).

Suggested Use: 1-2 tablets one to two times daily between meals - 750-3,000 mg per day of kudzu, or as recommended by your health care professional.

## 6. L-Glutamine

I recommend Now Foods, L-Glutamine Double Strength, 1000 mg, 120 Capsules

Description: Decreases physiological cravings for alcohol. Glutamic acid is converted to glutamine in the liver. It's utilized as an energy source and helps control sugar cravings, important because alcohol, chemically, is nearly identical to sugar. Abusive alcohol consumption hinders the creation and absorption of glutamine, which serves many vital functions. Critical to an alcohol recovery program L-Glutamine can quickly halt cravings. It's also proven effective in reducing aggressive sugar and carbohydrate craving in many individuals in early withdrawal.

Studies have shown that 2,000 mg. of L-Glutamine spread out daily, decreases alcohol craving. Many rehabilitation centers use mega doses—up to three or four times—when treating patients. Numerous human clinical trials demonstrated even at high doses, glutamine had no side effects and is well received from a tolerance perspective.

L-Glutamine is a very important part of an alcohol recovery nutritional program. It can be taken ongoing or only when you have a compulsion to drink. In capsule form a 1000 mg. dose can be taken directly by pouring half a capsule of powder onto your tongue. During the beginning phase of treatment 1000 – 3000 mg. per day are recommended. For optimum results it should be taken along with the B 50 supplement as the two combine will aid in absorption of the L-Glutamine.

L-Glutamine: One to three capsules (1,000- 3,000 mg.) usually taken between meals.

## Two Anti-Anxiety Supplements For Mood Support:

### 7. GABA

I recommend Now Foods, GABA (Gamma Aminobutyric Acid), 750 mg, 100 Vcaps

Description: Natural Calming Effect -Promotes Relaxation -Eases Nervous Tension

GABA (gamma aminobutyric acid) is a non-essential amino acid found mainly in the human brain and eyes. It is considered an inhibitory

neurotransmitter, which means it regulates brain and nerve cell activity by inhibiting the number of neurons firing in the brain. GABA is referred to as the "brain's natural calming agent". By inhibiting over-stimulation of the brain, GABA may help promote relaxation and ease nervous tension. NOW provides only the naturally occurring L-form as found in food and in the body.

GABA (gamma amino butyric acid) acts as our body's inherent tranquilizer. This neurotransmitter, along with norepinephrine, serotonin and dopamine, is linked closely to addictive behavior. Researchers have identified several sections on chromosome 4 that may contain genes related to alcohol metabolism and GABA receptors, which they suppose could be responsible for the genetic predisposition to alcohol dependence. Existing theories imply that people who experience alcohol addiction could well have a deficiency of GABA (and glutamine) which results in continuous craving and/or anxiety.

Chronic consumption of alcohol reduces the level of GABA neuro-receptors. It is related to the brain's reward system. For some alcoholics, drinking "turns on" the GABA "stop switch" but only in the near-term. So this action uses up the supply of the feel good chemicals in the brain, which affect a continued yearning for alcohol. GABA supplements can restore brain chemistry, diminish stress and decrease addictive urges.

Suggested Use: As a dietary supplement, take 1 capsule 2 or 3 times daily as needed, preferably with juice or water on an empty stomach.

## 8. L-Theanine

I recommend Jarrow Formulas, Theanine 100, 100 mg, 60 Capsules

Description: Amino Acid Derivative Neurotransmitter - Promotes Relaxation and Learning Ability

L-Theanine, 100 to 200 mg. per day, is considered to be helpful for relaxation, stress release and improving concentration. Amino Acid Derivative Neurotransmitter Promotes Relaxation and Learning Ability Theanine is a unique amino acid found almost exclusively in green tea that exerts beneficial effects on brain metabolism. Theanine induces relaxation without causing drowsiness, as measured by increasing generation of alpha-waves. Theanine may improve learning ability and sensations of pleasure by affecting dopamine and serotonin neurotransmitters in the brain by antagonizing glutamate toxicity.

Suggested Use: Take 1 to 2 capsules per day of L-Glutamine with water or juice on an empty stomach or as directed by your physician.

## **More on Supplements and Vitamins that may be helpful**

– Edited from PeaceHealth.org:

Many alcoholics are deficient in B vitamins, including vitamin B3. John Cleary, M.D., observed that some alcoholics spontaneously stopped drinking in association with taking niacin supplements (niacin is a form of vitamin B3). Dr. Cleary concluded that alcoholism might be a manifestation of niacin deficiency in some people and recommended that alcoholics consider supplementation with 500 mg of niacin per day.

Without specifying the amount of niacin used, Dr. Cleary's preliminary research findings suggested that niacin supplementation helped wean some alcoholics away from alcohol. Activated vitamin B3 used intravenously has also helped alcoholics quit drinking. Niacinamide—a safer form of the same vitamin, might have similar actions and has been reported to improve alcohol metabolism in animals.

Deficiencies of other B-complex vitamins are common with chronic alcohol use. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that alcoholics have an increased need for B vitamins. It is possible that successful treatment of B-complex vitamin deficiencies may actually reduce alcohol cravings, because animals crave alcohol when fed a B-complex-deficient diet. Many doctors recommend 100 mg of B-complex vitamins per day.

The daily combination of 3 grams of vitamin C, 3 grams of niacin, 600 mg of vitamin B6, and 600 IU of vitamin E has been used by researchers from the University Of Mississippi Medical Center in an attempt to reduce anxiety and depression in alcoholics. Although the effect of vitamin supplementation was no better than placebo in treating alcohol-associated depression, the vitamins did result in a significant drop in anxiety within three weeks of use. Because of possible side effects, anyone taking such high amounts of niacin and vitamin B6 must do so only under the care of a doctor.

Although the incidence of B-complex deficiencies is known to be high in alcoholics, the incidence of other vitamin deficiencies remains less clear. Nonetheless, deficiencies of vitamin A, vitamin D, vitamin E, and vitamin C are seen in many alcoholics. While some reports have suggested it may be safer for alcoholics to supplement with beta-carotene instead of vitamin A, potential problems accompany the use of either vitamin A or beta-carotene in correcting the deficiency induced by alcoholism.

These problems result in part because the combinations of alcohol and vitamin A or alcohol and beta-carotene appear to increase potential damage to the liver. Thus, vitamin A-depleted alcoholics require a doctor's intervention, including supplementation with vitamin A and beta-carotene accompanied by assessment of liver function. Supplementing with vitamin

C, on the other hand, appears to help the body rid itself of alcohol. Some doctors recommend 1 to 3 grams per day of vitamin C.

Kenneth Blum and researchers at the University Of Texas have examined neurotransmitter deficiencies in alcoholics. Neurotransmitters are the chemicals the body makes to allow nerve cells to pass messages (of pain, touch, thought, etc.) from cell to cell. Amino acids are the precursors of these neurotransmitters.

In double-blind research, a group of alcoholics were treated with 1.5 grams of D,L-phenylalanine (DLPA), 900 mg of L-tyrosine, 300 mg of L-glutamine, and 400 mg of L-tryptophan (now available only by prescription) per day, plus a multivitamin-mineral supplement. This nutritional supplement regimen led to a significant reduction in withdrawal symptoms and decreased stress in alcoholics compared to the effects of placebo.

The amino acid, L-glutamine, has also been used as an isolated supplement. Animal research has shown that glutamine supplementation reduces alcohol intake, a finding that has been confirmed in double-blind human research. In that trial, 1 gram of glutamine per day given in divided portions with meals decreased both the desire to drink and anxiety levels.

Alcoholics are sometimes deficient in magnesium, and some researchers believe that symptoms of withdrawal may result in part from this deficiency. Because of the multiple nutrient deficiencies associated with alcoholism, most alcoholics who quit drinking should supplement with a high-potency multivitamin-mineral for at least several months after the detoxification period. Whether or not the supplement should include iron should be discussed with a doctor.

### **Herbs that may be helpful - From PeaceHealth.org:**

**- Edited from PeaceHealth.org.**

Milk thistle extract is commonly recommended to counteract the harmful effects of alcohol on the liver. Milk thistle extracts have been shown in one double-blind study to reduce death due to alcohol-induced cirrhosis of the liver, though another double-blind study did not confirm this finding. Milk thistle extract may protect the cells of the liver by both blocking the entrance of harmful toxins and helping remove these toxins from the liver cells. Milk thistle has also been reported to regenerate injured liver cells.

Kudzu is most famous as a quick-growing weed in the southern United States. Alcoholic hamsters (one of the few animals to become so besides humans) were found to have decreased interest in drinking when fed kudzu extract. Traditional Chinese medicine practitioners generally recommend 3 to 5 grams of root three times per day; some herbal

practitioners also suggest that 3 to 4 ml of tincture taken three times per day may also be helpful to reduce alcohol cravings.

Supplementing with a kudzu extract (1,000 mg three times a day for seven days) significantly reduced the amount of beer consumed by heavy alcohol drinkers in a short-term experiment.

### **More On Kudzu**

#### **- Edited from PeaceHealth.org.**

Article about kudzu from the Harvard University Gazette:

"Kudzu Cuts Alcohol Consumption"

"Researchers at McLean Hospital in Belmont, Mass., suspected that excessive drinking might be curbed by giving drinkers an extract of kudzu, a pesky, rapidly growing weed common in the Southern states. They knew it has been used for that purpose in China since 600 A.D.

"These results prompted us to test an herbal extract of it on humans," notes Scott Lukas, professor of psychiatry at McLean, a psychiatric hospital affiliated with Harvard Medical School. He recruited 14 men and women, average age 24 years. The "laboratory" was an apartment where each person was allowed to drink as many beers as he or she wanted, up to a maximum of six. After determining how much each person drinks normally, half were given a capsule of kudzu or an inactive pill or placebo.

The results were dramatic. "Those who took kudzu drank significantly less than those on placebo," says Lukas. "Everyone took that first drink when they came to the apartment after work. But the kudzu group was slower and less likely to reach for the second or third beer. They downed an average of one or two beers while the placebo group finished three or four. Alcohol consumption was almost cut in half."

Beyond that, those on kudzu drank more slowly. "They needed more gulps to finish each beer," Lukas continues. "That tells us they are responding to cues from their brains telling them they don't need to drink so much."

So in the first study of its kind, the much-maligned Kudzu vine shows great potential for reducing binge drinking, defined as putting down five or more drinks in one sitting for a man, or four or more consecutive drinks for a woman. Binge drinking is a huge problem on most college campuses. A Harvard School of Public Health survey recently found that one-third to one-half of these students admit to binge drinking, thus contributing to alcohol being the third leading cause of death and disability in the United States.

## **Fewer Hangovers**

Another plus for kudzu is a lack of side effects. "We gave our subjects a low dose for one week," Lukas explains. "Then we gave them blood and urine tests and physical exams. No changes were found. It's a wonderful result. If we raised the dose and gave it for a longer period, alcohol consumption might be decreased even more. We expect to look into this possibility."

If people drink less, hangovers should be reduced in number and severity. "That's possible," Lukas agrees. "Drinking half the number of beers or drinks, say three or four instead of six or eight, should have a lesser effect the next day." But, he points out; there are no studies to demonstrate that kudzu would act like a morning-after pill for eliminating hangovers.

"We bought a variety of kudzu extracts from stores and Internet sites, tested them, and found that none of them worked, he says." David Lee, a chemist on our research team did assays that showed these products contained less than 1 percent of active kudzu."

Lukas' group increased the concentration to 30-40 percent, and instructed their drinkers to take two of the pills three times a day. Commercial sellers of kudzu advise people to take many more doses a day. "These products also contain lots of protein and starch," Lukas notes. "They are as filling as a meal and so reduce your desire to drink as much alcohol as you might do normally."

## **How It Works**

In China, high concentrations of one of Kudzu's active ingredients (puerarin) are used medically to increase blood flow to the brain and heart, particularly in emergencies. "Wherever blood goes, alcohol goes," Lukas explains. "We think that this triggers a quicker response. The brain says 'enough' in less time. People feel satisfied on fewer beers.

"Kudzu is not going to take someone who drinks 30 beers a week and turn him or her into a teetotaler, but you might go from 30 to 15 a week. It's not a panacea or a magic bullet, but it looks like it could be a tool for people to reduce their drinking."

Edited from the Harvard University Gazette article '[Kudzu Cuts Alcohol Consumption](#)' May 2006 by William J. Cromie