

# Naltrexone Pellet Treatment (for Opiate, Heroin, and Alcohol Addiction) Frequently asked questions

## **What is Naltrexone?**

Naltrexone is a prescription drug that completely blocks the effects of heroin and all opioid drugs including Vicodin, Oxycodone, Hydrocodone and many prescription pain medications and improves the success rate for addiction recovery. In 1984, an oral pill of this drug was approved by the FDA for chronic opioid addiction. This form of treatment has not been very effective because patients need to take the drug on a daily basis in order for it to block the opioid effects. Patients that have not had extended periods of abstinence and developed the essential "adult life skills" are at an extreme high risk for relapse in this situation.

Naltrexone is also available in a monthly injection as a prescription drug called Vivitrol. The monthly injection eliminates the problem of daily dosing, and is usually well tolerated by patients. This is a better option than the oral dose, but the expense for most patients and short duration of activity make it less than ideal as a treatment option.

Another option for delivering Naltrexone is an extended release pellet. This option offers the best combination of a three or six month duration of benefits with a lower cost per month for the recovering addict. While Naltrexone is being slowly released into the body, it is virtually impossible to relapse into opioid or heroin use. Licensed pharmacists manufacture the implant for us. While the Naltrexone implant has not yet been submitted to the FDA for approval, the medications it contains are fully approved by the FDA.

## **Are Naltrexone pellets safe?**

Naltrexone in all forms are relatively safe. Initial studies suggested that it could cause additional liver problems in patients with acute liver disease such as hepatitis, but in practice it has been well tolerated for most other patients. Patients receiving the pellets obviously can expect slight bruising and discomfort for a short time and also have a very small risk of post procedure infection but this has not occurred in any of our patients.

If Naltrexone therapy is begun before the patient has significantly detoxed from the opioids, the pellet will cause severe opioid withdrawal symptoms. Also, if a patient on Naltrexone therapy is in an accident or trauma where narcotic medicines are normally used for pain relief, then the narcotics would have no effect. Should the patient be injured after the procedure and require analgesia (pain medications), he must inform the doctor that he is on naltrexone maintenance therapy so that the proper medications may be prescribed. Because the patient may be involved in an accident or some other occurrence that renders him unable to inform the doctor that he is on the medication, it is recommended that he wear a Medic-Alert tag which advises the doctor that the patient is receiving naltrexone maintenance therapy.

In this situation doctors can remove the implant or provide non-narcotic pain medicines and sedatives. There are some risks associated with the Naltrexone pellet such as the small risk of infection or inflammation. If patients try to over-ride the effects of Naltrexone and abuse narcotics they have a very un-predictable and dangerous risk of a fatal overdose. Patients also need to be especially careful after the implant wears off because they no longer have a tolerance for the drug. The same amount of drug previously used after a period of abstinence can be fatal.

## **How does Naltrexone compare with Opioid Maintenance Therapy (OMT) Drugs such as Methadone, Suboxone, and Subutex?**

Unlike these drugs, Naltrexone does not have an "opioid" effect. Because of this fact, Naltrexone is allowed in most treatment recovery programs and in sober living homes. In addition, once a person

is on Naltrexone, they cannot get a drug high from opioid use and they can stop without any withdrawal symptoms. Although OMT drugs can be useful in short term detox programs, they should not be continued for an extended period to reduce the potential "medical" addiction to the prescription drug. Is Naltrexone pellet therapy a cure to opioid or heroin addiction? In a word, NO. We believe strongly that Naltrexone pellet therapy by itself is not a cure, but during the period of its opioid blocking effects, it virtually eliminates the possibility of relapse. This is the key for many addicts who want to recover but believe it's impossible when they're dealing with daily cravings.

Freedom from the cravings and knowing there is no "reward" of getting high allows the mental energy of the recovering addict that is 100% committed to recovery to put all of their focus on a 12-step program and/or professional therapy. Studies have shown that the best indicator of long-term recovery is continued participation in a 12-step recovery program. Most addicts have not developed the life-skills and behaviors required for life long sobriety. This is the real work in addiction recovery and one that cannot be ignored or assumed to take care of itself while enjoying the freedom from cravings. Naltrexone therapy without the appropriate therapy and 12-step support is almost always unsuccessful.

### **Can Naltrexone also be used for alcoholic recovery?**

The ultimate goal of recovery from alcoholism is abstinence and learning how to live without drinking. We believe that the cornerstones of a recovery program include 12-step support groups and professional counseling. There are also a number of medicines that can assist in achieving and maintaining abstinence. Naltrexone is probably the most powerful of these medicines. Naltrexone is a drug that attaches to the opiate receptors in the brain and blocks them. Part of the pleasurable effect from alcohol happens through these opiate receptors. When these receptors are blocked, people get fewer cravings for alcohol and less pleasure if they do drink any alcohol. It becomes much easier for them to stay abstinent and continue with their recovery program.

### **How long should I stay on Naltrexone therapy?**

We believe strongly that patients should be on Naltrexone therapy for a minimum of twelve months. This prevents them from relapsing back to narcotic use and gives them at least a year to start making changes in their lives and working in a support group. After the first 12 months, patients should consult with their counselor and Dr. Nelson. Patients that decide they want to continue with Naltrexone therapy can receive additional pellets or transition to daily oral Naltrexone medication.

### **Am I a candidate for Naltrexone Pellet Therapy?**

Naltrexone would be appropriate for any opiate addict who desperately wants to stop using opiates but has never managed to stay sober for a long period. The term we use to best describe this person is that they are in a state of "readiness". A person may say they are ready to recover, however this will only be confirmed through their actions that will soon be obvious to their 12-step group, their therapist, their family and friends, etc. they will consistently make life affirming changes that are consistent with self-reliance and emotional maturity.

Naltrexone is very helpful for those that are "ready" but know that relying on will power or counseling alone will not work for them. Naltrexone is not a mood altering drug and is therefore not objectionable to most individuals or sober living homes that require abstinence. Participation in a 12-step recovery program is the single most important form of follow-up care. We believe there is no substitute for the therapeutic value of one addict helping another.

### **What's the process of evaluation and treatment with Naltrexone pellet therapy?**

A person needs to be free from opiates or heroin for a minimum of 1 week before receiving a Naltrexone pellet. Those on Methadone, Suboxone or Subutex should be off their prescription for at least 10-14 days because these drugs take longer to clear from the body. We require a simple blood

test, a basic screening and exam to decrease the risks and increase the success of Naltrexone therapy. We will also perform a urine drug screen immediately prior to the pellet insertion. The procedure is a simple and takes just a few minutes to perform. The doctor will numb the area and then make a small incision and place one pellet (3 month duration) or 2 pellets (6 month) under the skin. The incision is closed with a few stitches and the patient is sent home or could even go back to work if they want to.

It is recommended that patients wear a Medic-Alert tag (bracelet or necklace) that would inform a treating physician that the patient is on naltrexone maintenance therapy in the event that the patient is not able to communicate this information. The physician would obviously need to prescribe a non-opiate medication if pain relief was required. There are very few side effects from naltrexone and none of them are serious. It is difficult to determine whether the symptoms that are sometimes experienced are due to the naltrexone or the last remnants of the withdrawal syndrome. The withdrawal symptoms do not occur with every patient, especially if the addict has not used drugs for an extended period. Even if the patient experiences some withdrawal symptoms, they are generally mild compared to acute withdrawals experienced during drug detox and cease within a week or so.

### **How much does the procedure cost?**

The cost of the initial consultation is \$195. This includes a full review of the patient history, an intake screening exam, and the required blood work. If it is determined the patient is a good candidate for Naltrexone therapy, a pellet order will be placed with our compounding pharmacy at this time. Usually, we can schedule the pellet procedure for one week after the initial exam. Many patients have found it is best to coordinate their schedule so they can have their pellet procedure performed immediately after they complete their in-patient detoxification program. The cost for a single pellet insertion that will last approximately 3 months is \$795. The cost for 2 pellets is \$1395.

### **About Dr. Nelson**

Dr. William Nelson has 18 years of experience integrating the latest advances in medical science with time-honored therapies of Naturopathic medicine. He is an expert in Naltrexone therapy for opiate, heroin, and alcohol addiction recovery, non-surgical joint and back pain relief, fatigue due to thyroid and adrenal disorders, bio-identical hormone pellet therapy for men and women, IV ozone and nutritional therapy. "Over the last five years, I became extremely frustrated and saddened because I couldn't help a loved one that desperately needed help to overcome her heroin addiction. Because of the benefits of Naltrexone pellet therapy I discovered and was able to provide when she was in a state of "readiness", she is now sober and on the road to recovery. My personal mission is to help other patients and their families the same way I was able to help my family member."

Dr. Nelson formerly worked for a local business specializing in Naltrexone treatment, but has chosen to provide this service independently to make it more affordable. He has recently set up two locations and is now taking appointments in his Scottsdale and North Phoenix locations.

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