

TSM 101 for Medical Professionals

What is the Sinclair Method (TSM)?

The Sinclair Method (TSM) is a research based, medication assisted treatment for alcohol use disorder that targets the brain's reward system through the process of pharmacological extinction resulting in the reduction of heavy drinking and addictive cravings. It is a dual treatment that targets both physical cravings and behavior changes, including healthy habit replacement.

What are the patient benefits of TSM?

1. Alcohol reduction or elimination without the risks associated with detox.
2. Alcohol reduction lowers treatment barriers often associated with abstinence.
3. TSM is cost effective. The medication is generic.
4. TSM is NOT replacement therapy. Opiate antagonists are considered to have no abuse potential.
5. TSM does not involve constant endorphin dampening. Medication is targeted to the drinking activity, so it is only used when drinking.
6. TSM can help form healthy habits. Patients should be advised to take part in pleasurable activities on the days when they do not drink.

What about therapy?

If your patient has co-occurring mental disorders, they should also seek treatment for those co-occurring disorders you are unable to treat. However, according to SAMHSA, fewer than 40% of people with AUD have a co-occurring mental disorder. For patients not seeing a licensed therapist, counselor or psychologist, we recommend TSM coaching, which we can provide.

Options Save Lives offers free digital peer support in our moderated Options Save Lives forum, as well as several private Facebook groups. We continue to add additional support opportunities as needs arise.

How fast does TSM work?

Everyone is different, but on average we see the following:

First 30 days	10 – 20% reduction
30 days – 6 months	10 – 50% reduction
6 – 12 months	50 – 90% reduction
1 – 2 years	70 – 100% reduction
2+ years	80 – 100% reduction

Are there side effects?

Side effects are a potential with every medication, and naltrexone is no different. If one has a side effect to naltrexone it is probably going to be some mild or transient nausea. This happens for approximately 10% of naltrexone users.

Experienced clinicians generally start patients on a half dose (25mg) for a few days, or until side effects subside and encourage patients to eat a full meal before or with the medication. This can serve two purposes—minimizing side effects and slowing alcohol absorption once the patient begins drinking.

It is important to remind patients that a half dose is not yet the TSM protocol and that if they do not want to drink alcohol after taking a pill, they should never feel obligated to drink alcohol simply because they took the medication. This is especially important in the beginning when they are not taking the full dose.

Can anyone use TSM?

No. The Sinclair Method is not recommended for those with extended periods of abstinence who are not at imminent risk of relapse. Pregnancy and severe liver damage are also contraindications.

Naltrexone cannot be used in the presence of narcotics. It is in the same drug class as naloxone and has the potential to precipitate withdrawal. It is important that the patient is honest about any drug use, including the use of herbal supplements and over-the-counter medications. If kratom is legal in your area, it is important to discuss the potential for harmful interaction with naltrexone due its opioid-like properties.