

Drug and alcohol abuse medications shown to improve patients' lives

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Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

Commonly used medications for alcohol and opioid addictions have been shown for the first time to reduce the risk of suicidal behaviour and accidental overdose.

Researchers from the University of Oxford, the Karolinska Institutet,

Stockholm, the University of Colorado and Örebro University, Sweden, studied more than 21,000 individuals in Sweden who received treatment with at least one of four medications used to treat alcohol and opioid use disorders (acamprosate, naltrexone, methadone, and buprenorphine).

They compared rates of [suicidal behaviour](#), accidental [overdose](#), and crime for the same individuals during the period when they were receiving the medication compared with the period when they were not.

Most of the drugs were effective in reducing incidence of all of the outcome measures (suicidal behaviour, arrest for any crime, arrest for [violent crime](#), accidental overdose). These medications reduced the risk of suicidal behaviour by up to 40 percent, accidental overdoses up to 25 percent, arrest for any crime by up to 23 percent and arrest for violent crime by up to 35 percent. However, methadone treatment increased the risk of accidental overdose by 25 percent.

Professor Seena Fazel of Oxford's Department of Psychiatry, the lead author on the study, said: "While it has been established that these medications are effective in reducing alcohol and [opioid abuse](#), this is the first time that real-world improvements in these key health and social outcomes have been demonstrated.

"Substance abuse has huge effects on public health including premature mortality, infectious diseases, and [chronic health problems](#), which makes it imperative that we find a safe and effective way of helping people with addictions to regain control of their lives.

"There are still questions to ask about why methadone in particular appears to be less effective than the other drugs for [accidental overdose](#), but this could be partly due to it sometimes being used in conjunction with other substances."

Deaths from overdoses of prescription and illicit opioids have increased in many countries, contributing to substantially reduced life expectancy. Nonfatal overdoses are also common. Studies have shown that 30 percent-80 percent of people who use illicit drugs regularly have experienced at least one nonfatal overdose.

The full paper, "Medications for Alcohol and Opioid Use Disorders and Risk of Suicidal Behavior, Accidental Overdoses, and Crime," is published in the *American Journal of Psychiatry*.

More information: Yasmina Molero et al. Medications for Alcohol and Opioid Use Disorders and Risk of Suicidal Behavior, Accidental Overdoses, and Crime, *American Journal of Psychiatry* (2018). [DOI: 10.1176/appi.ajp.2018.17101112](https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ajp.2018.17101112)

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