

Medications for Opioid Use Disorder



Methadone

Methadone is taken as a liquid or tablet. For opioid use disorder (OUD), methadone is only offered at licensed opioid treatment programs. At the start of treatment, patients must go to the clinic almost every day to take each dose.



Buprenorphine

(Suboxone, Zubsolv, Sublocade, Brixadi)

Buprenorphine (or buprenorphine/naloxone) can be taken daily as a film or tablet that melts under the tongue, or it can be given as a shot that lasts for 1 week or 1 month. Buprenorphine is prescribed by physicians, nurse practitioners, or PAs. Patients fill their prescription for tablets or films at a pharmacy or visit a health care facility to receive the shot.



Naltrexone (Vivitrol)

Naltrexone is usually given as a shot that lasts for 1 month. Patients must not use opioids for about 7 to 10 days before starting naltrexone. Naltrexone is prescribed by physicians, nurse practitioners, and PAs. Patients visit a health care facility to receive the shot.

How long do you take medication for opioid use disorder?

OUD is a chronic illness like diabetes or heart disease. It can require treatment over many years or even for life. **Treatment continues as long as the medication is helping.**

Medications for Opioid Use Disorder

Medications save lives.

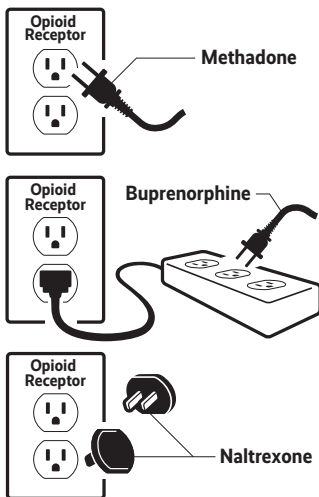
Medications for opioid use disorder (OUD) decrease illegal opioid use, prevent relapse, and lower the risk of death from overdose. In other words, taking medication helps people with OUD enter *remission* and supports their *recovery*.

Remission means having OUD symptoms under control. **Recovery** is a process by which individuals improve their health, live self-directed lives, and strive to reach their full potential.

How do the medications work?

Opioids, like heroin or oxycodone, work at specific receptors in the brain. Think of a plug in an outlet. People with OUD who take opioids regularly feel sick if they suddenly stop because no opioid is plugged in.

Methadone and buprenorphine are treatments that plug into the receptor. They treat withdrawal, decrease cravings, and can help with pain.



Methadone is like a regular plug that fully activates the receptor.

Buprenorphine is like a plug in a power strip that partially activates the receptor.

Naltrexone is like a plug cover that blocks the receptor without activating it.

Taking Sublingual Buprenorphine

What does *sublingual* mean?

Sublingual means “applied under the tongue.” If buprenorphine (or buprenorphine/naloxone) is swallowed, the medication won’t work. Instead, sublingual products are dissolved in the saliva under the tongue, and buprenorphine absorbs directly into the body from the inside of the mouth. Taking it correctly helps you get the most out of your medication.

Sublingual buprenorphine products may be tablets or films, but they are all used the same way.

Important information to remember:



Avoid using tobacco products right before and after taking buprenorphine. While the medication is dissolving in your mouth, avoid talking, eating, drinking, spitting, or smoking. It may take 10 minutes or more for each dose to fully dissolve.



Sublingual buprenorphine may damage teeth. To prevent damage, wait for your medication to fully dissolve, then rinse your mouth with water and swallow. Wait at least an hour before brushing your teeth. It is also important to see a dentist regularly.



Different buprenorphine products might dissolve differently or have different flavors. If taste or texture is a problem, ask your pharmacist or doctor about other options. Do not stop this medication without talking to your health care team.

Taking Sublingual Buprenorphine

1. Prepare correct dose

The pharmacy label on the package will show how many tablets or films to take. You may need to split a tablet or film and take only half. Open packaging with dry hands.

2. Lift tongue and place medication underneath

Place the medication toward the base of the tongue on the left and/or right side. Do not chew, crush, or swallow the tablets or films.

Tablets: If your dose is more than one, you can place them all in your mouth together or place and dissolve one or two at a time.

Films: If your dose is more than one, place and dissolve no more than two films at a time. Do not stack films or tablets on top of each other in your mouth.

3. Let medication fully dissolve under tongue

Buprenorphine must be fully dissolved under the tongue to get a complete dose. It can take up to 10 minutes or more to dissolve. Do not talk, smoke, eat, drink, or spit while the medication is in your mouth. When the dose is fully dissolved, you may swallow or spit the saliva, then rinse your mouth with water.



Prepare

Determine dose and split medication if needed



Place

Put medication under the tongue



Dissolve

Keep medication in mouth until it is completely dissolved

Buprenorphine: Getting Started

What is Buprenorphine?

Buprenorphine (or buprenorphine/naloxone) is a medication that partially activates opioid receptors to treat the withdrawal and cravings from opioid use disorder (OUD) and stabilize the brain. Buprenorphine brand names include Suboxone, Subutex, Zubsolv, Brixadi, and Sublocade.

Buprenorphine Initiation



Your health care team will usually have you wait until you are in mild to moderate opioid withdrawal before you take your first dose of buprenorphine. If you don't wait for withdrawal, the first dose of buprenorphine could make you very sick.



In the initiation phase, you should start feeling better on day 1 and you should improve each day. The goal is a dose that prevents withdrawal but doesn't cause side effects like sleepiness. Your health care team will help you get there, but if you don't feel better, let someone know. Your dose may need to change. Once your dose is stable, you will enter the maintenance phase.



Possible Side Effects

Tell your health care team if you are having any side effects so they can help you prevent them. Common side effects of buprenorphine include:

- Dizziness
- Sleepiness
- Constipation
- Nausea
- Headaches
- Flushing

Buprenorphine: Getting Started

Buprenorphine Maintenance

Continue taking buprenorphine as directed. Missing doses or stopping on your own could make you sick or cause OUD symptoms. Plan ahead for picking up and taking your medication on time. Tell your health care team as soon as possible about problems or side effects. Your medication may need to be adjusted.

OUD is often a chronic illness, so buprenorphine can be used as long as it helps. People who take medication for OUD for more than a year have a better chance at long-term success. There is no time limit on treatment.



Resources for Recovery

Living with OUD can be challenging, but you are not alone. More than 2 million people in the US take medication for OUD. Counseling, peer support, and caring friends and family can help on your journey. Setbacks, including return to use, may happen. OUD remission and recovery are always possible.

Additional tools are available, including in-person and online support groups, recovery housing, and other community services and organizations.

Suicide and Crisis Lifeline: Call 988

Treatment and Community Resource Locator:
Visit www.findhelpnowky.org

KY HELP Statewide Call Center: Call 1-877-318-1871

Buprenorphine: Know Your Options

There are several different forms of buprenorphine for opioid use disorder (OUD). Finding the right product and staying on your medication is important to treatment success. OUD is often a chronic illness, so work with your health care team to find a product that works for you.

Buprenorphine Products



Sublingual

Buprenorphine/naloxone is available in a sublingual tablet or film. *Sublingual* means the product is dissolved in the saliva under the tongue and buprenorphine absorbs directly into the body from the inside of the mouth. Buprenorphine/naloxone is usually taken once a day. Your daily dose may be more than one tablet or film. You may take brand **Suboxone** or **Zubsolv** or a generic version. **Buprenorphine** without naloxone is also available in a sublingual tablet and is typically used for patients who have a medical reason they cannot take naloxone. Buprenorphine is only available in generic form.



Injectable*

Buprenorphine comes in two products that can be injected under the skin to treat OUD. **Brixadi** is given once weekly or once monthly. **Sublocade** is given once monthly. To ensure safety, these products must be injected by a trained health care professional.

*Your health care team may have you start with sublingual buprenorphine before using an injectable form.

Buprenorphine: Know Your Options

Finding the Right Medication



Your recovery process is like a puzzle, and medication is often an important piece. Just like every piece is different, every patient's recovery is different. Finding which pieces fit with your lifestyle is important.



Sublingual buprenorphine comes in tablets or films. Products may have different flavors depending on the manufacturer. If you find it uncomfortable or unpleasant to take your medication, switching products could be an option. Injectable forms are also available to avoid the taste entirely.



Name brand medications tend to cost more than generic medications. Your pharmacy will automatically provide the generic unless you or your doctor say not to. The price of medications can vary. If you have prescription insurance, there may be limits on the products it will pay for.



Sublingual buprenorphine is usually taken once a day for OUD. If daily dosing does not fit your lifestyle, switching to a weekly or monthly injectable form might work better for you.



If you are pregnant, nursing, or trying to become pregnant, let your health care team know. You can stay on medication, but your buprenorphine product or dose might need to be adjusted.