

Patient Guide to Starting Buprenorphine

The Big Picture:

- 1) You will stop all opioids for at least 12-24 hours.
- 2) You will wait for moderate withdrawal symptoms to start.
- 3) You will start buprenorphine after you have withdrawal symptoms.
- 4) Over several days, you will figure out the right dose of buprenorphine.

Who to contact with buprenorphine questions & problems:

Name: _____ Telephone #: _____

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Reference: This guide was modified from Lee and colleagues. Lee JD, Grossman E, DiRocco D, Gourevitch MN. Home Buprenorphine/Naloxone Induction in Primary Care. J General Internal Medicine. 2008;24(2)226-232.

Table of Contents

Buprenorphine Basics	3
Your Pain and Mood	4
Starting Buprenorphine	5
Day 1: Starting Buprenorphine	6
Day 2: Continuing Buprenorphine	7
Day 3: Continuing Buprenorphine	8
Day 4 & After: Continuing Buprenorphine	9
Dosing Summary	10

Buprenorphine Basics

Background information

- This guide is about buprenorphine-naloxone sublingual (under the tongue) tablets or film. The brand name for this medication is Suboxone. Buprenorphine is the active ingredient. Naloxone is inactive when the medication is taken as directed.
- It takes a few days to figure out the correct amount of buprenorphine to take. Each person needs a different amount. This handout will direct you on how much to take and when. If you have questions, please ask! Your care team is here to help you through this transition.

Important details to remember

- In the first few days, the dose of buprenorphine is adjusted to take care of withdrawal symptoms caused by stopping opioids. Withdrawal symptoms can include flu-like body aching or increased pain. The dose adjustment in the first days is not aimed at reducing your usual pain. The effect of the new medication on pain will be clear after a few weeks, after your body gets used to it.
- Your prescriber will provide guidance on how many times per day you should take buprenorphine. Make sure you understand how to take the medication before you start.
- Continue to take your other usual medications on your normal, regular schedule.

How to take buprenorphine

- Place the film or table under the tongue and let it dissolve. (see Figure 1 below)
- Tablets or films should be taken one at time.
- The medication is absorbed through the thin skin on the bottom of your tongue.
- The tablets/films do not work if you swallow them.



Figure 1

Your Pain and Mood

To help your care team better manage your transition to buprenorphine, please answer the following questions about both your pain and mood before making any changes. Your care team will ask you about how you responded to these questions during your follow-up visits.

1. What number best describes your pain on average in the past week:

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

No pain Pain as bad as you can imagine

2. What number best describes how, during the past week, pain has interfered with your enjoyment of life?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Does not interfere Completely interferes

3. What number best describes how, during the past week, pain has interfered with your general activity?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Does not interfere Completely interferes

Over the <i>last 2 weeks</i> , how often have you been bothered by the following problems?	Not at All	Several Days	More Than Half the Days	Nearly Every Day
Feeling nervous, anxious, or on edge	0	1	2	3
Not being able to stop or control worrying	0	1	2	3
Feeling down, depressed, or hopeless	0	1	2	3
Little interest or pleasure in doing things	0	1	2	3

Starting Buprenorphine

When to start buprenorphine

- It should be at least 12 hours since you used any short-acting opioids (like oxycodone, Percocet, morphine, hydrocodone, hydromorphone, Vicodin, or heroin).
- It should be at least 24 hours since you used any long-acting opioids (like Oxycontin, morphine SR, morphine SA, fentanyl, or methadone).
- You want to start to feel pretty lousy from withdrawal symptoms before taking a dose of buprenorphine. You do not need to wait so long that you feel totally awful.
- You should have several withdrawal symptoms and may feel like you have the flu. Starting buprenorphine should make you feel better.
- Potential withdrawal-related symptoms:
 - Joint and bone aches
 - Goose bumps
 - Twitching, tremors or shaking
 - Bad chills or sweating
 - Anxious or irritable
 - Enlarged pupils
 - Very restless, can't sit still
 - Heavy yawning
 - Runny nose, tears in eyes
 - Stomach cramps, nausea, vomiting or diarrhea

How to start buprenorphine

- Place the tablet or film under your tongue and keep it there until it dissolves.
 - Remember, if you are taking more than 1 tablet or film, let them dissolve one at a time.
- It takes 20-45 minutes for the medication to be absorbed and have an effect.
 - Feel better? Good, the medicine is working.
 - Still feel lousy after 45 minutes? Don't worry, in most cases you just need another dose.
 - Although very rare, allergic reactions to buprenorphine or naloxone are possible. Seek medical attention right away if you develop trouble breathing, hives, or swelling of the mouth or throat.
- If you take more medication and feel worse, call your buprenorphine provider.
- Follow the steps on the next pages to figure out the correct dose.

Your personal plan for starting:

- Stop opioids:
 - Last dose of _____ on _____ at _____.
 - Last dose of _____ on _____ at _____.
- Start taking buprenorphine on _____ at _____.
- Other instructions: _____

Day 1: Starting Buprenorphine

How much buprenorphine to take & when to take it.

Mark the checkbox (☐) next to each action you take.

Step 1:

- Place _____ of buprenorphine under your tongue and let it dissolve.
 - ☐ Record the time you took this dose here: _____. This is your first dose.

Step 2:

- Wait 1-3 hours to evaluate the need for a dose.
 - ☐ If you are starting to feel quite lousy again:
 - ➔ Place _____ of buprenorphine under your tongue and let it dissolve.
 - ➔ Record the time you took the dose here: _____. This is your second dose.
 - ☐ If you are feeling okay:
 - ➔ Do not take another dose at this time.
 - ➔ Write down the time you decided not to take a dose. Record that time here: _____.

Step 3 (afternoon/evening dose):

- Wait 4-8 hours after the time recorded in Step 2.
 - ☐ If you are starting to feel quite lousy again:
 - ➔ Place _____ of buprenorphine under your tongue and let it dissolve.
 - ➔ Record the time you took the dose here: _____. This is your third dose.
 - ☐ If you are feeling okay:
 - ➔ Do not take another dose.
 - ➔ Write down the time you decided not to take a dose. Record that time here: _____.
- Fill out the chart on **page 10** as a guide.

(You should be feeling better. If you still feel really bad, contact your buprenorphine provider.)

Do not take more than _____ of buprenorphine in the **first 24 hours**.

Congratulations, you're done with Day 1!

Day 2: Continuing Buprenorphine

Mark the checkbox (☐) next to each action you take.

- How much buprenorphine you take on Day 2 depends on how you felt on Day 1. Remember to use the chart on page 10 as a guide.
- If you felt okay on Day 1:
 - ☐ Take the **same amount** of medication at the **same time** on Day 2 that you did on Day 1.
- If you felt drowsy or sedated on Day 1, you need to take **less** medication on Day 2.
 - ☐ If you took multiple doses on Day 1: **SKIP** the second dose on Day 2, but take other dose(s) the same way you did on Day 1.
 - ☐ If you took only one dose on Day 1: **Cut that dose in half** for Day 2.
- If you felt withdrawal symptoms that did not go away on Day 1, you probably need to take **more** medication on Day 2.
 - ☐ If you took 1 or 2 doses on Day 1: take **one more** dose on Day 2 (do not take more than 3 doses in one day).
 - ☐ If you took 3 doses on Day 1, increase the first dose of the day by adding 1 tablet or film:
 - ➔ Take _____ for your first dose.
 - ➔ Take _____ for your second dose.
 - ➔ Take _____ for your third dose.
- **If you are unsure what to do, contact your buprenorphine provider.**

Do not take more than _____ of buprenorphine on Day 2.

Day 3: Continuing Buprenorphine

Mark the checkbox () next to each action you take.

- How much buprenorphine you take on Day 3 depends on how you felt on Day 2. Use the chart on page 10 as a guide.
- If you felt okay on Day 2:
 - Take the **same amount** of medication at the **same time** on Day 3 as you did on Day 2.
- If you felt drowsy or sedated on Day 2, you need to take **less** medication on Day 3.
 - If you took multiple doses on Day 2: **SKIP** the second dose on Day 2, but take other doses the same way you did on Day 1.
 - If you took only one dose on Day 2: **Cut that dose in half** for Day 3.
- If you felt withdrawal symptoms on Day 2, you may need to take **more** medication on Day 3.
 - If you took 1 or 2 doses on Day 2: take **one more** dose on Day 3 (do not take more than 3 doses in one day).
 - If you took 3 doses on Day 2, increase **the first dose of the day** by adding 1 tablet or film:
 - ➔ Take _____ for your first dose.
 - ➔ Take _____ for your second dose.
 - ➔ Take _____ for your third dose.

If you are unsure what to do, contact your buprenorphine provider.

Do not take more than _____ of buprenorphine on Day 3.

Day 4 & After: Continuing Buprenorphine

How much buprenorphine to take & when to take it.

- You should have a follow-up visit by this time. Your provider will tell you how much medication you should be taking based on how your first few days went. Fill in the blanks below based on what they tell you, so you know how much buprenorphine you should be taking each day. Most people will take it once or twice a day.
- If you feel you need a higher dose to deal with cravings or other symptoms, discuss this with your provider before making any changes. You should never increase the dose by more than 4 mg per day. Also, never take more than 32 mg of buprenorphine in one day.
- To help your care team, please respond to the following questions about how your transition went and how you feel now.
 1. How would you rate your overall experience with transitioning to buprenorphine?
 - Poor
 - Fair
 - Good
 - Very good
 - Excellent
 2. Compared with how you felt on your previous opioid, how do you rate how you feel on buprenorphine?
 - Much worse
 - A little worse
 - About the same
 - A little better
 - Much better
- Dosing and follow-up information:

Dosing Summary – Fill out the chart below as you start buprenorphine

	Date & Day of the Week	Dose 1		Dose 2		Dose 3		Add up total dose for the day	How did it go?
		Time	Amount	Time	Amount	Time	Amount		
Example day	Monday, January 1	8:00 AM	4 mg (2 pills)	10:00 AM	2 mg (1 pill)	3:00 PM	2 mg (1 pill)	8 mg (4 pills) total	So far, so good!
Day 1									
Day 2									
Day 3									
Day 4									