

# Instructions for Starting Buprenorphine-Naloxone (Suboxone®) for Opioid Use Disorder (OUD)

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## What is buprenorphine-naloxone (Suboxone®)?

Buprenorphine-naloxone (Suboxone®) is a combination medication that helps treat opioid use disorder. Buprenorphine is a partial opioid, and naloxone is a safety ingredient added to prevent medication misuse.

## How does low-dose initiation of buprenorphine-naloxone (Suboxone®) work to treat opioid use disorder?

Taking small doses of this medication, and then increasing your doses over a few days, is a safe way for you to start treatment without having to detox from other non-prescription opioids (like heroin or fentanyl) first. This is called a **low-dose initiation plan**. A full daily dosing schedule is included at the end of this handout.

## What are some general tips for following this treatment plan?

- You will take buprenorphine-naloxone (Suboxone®) as a **film** (thin strip) that dissolves under your tongue. Over a few days, you slowly increase the amount of buprenorphine-naloxone (Suboxone®) in your body, which reduces your body's dependence on other opioids. This helps you successfully transition from using other opioids to buprenorphine-naloxone (Suboxone®) with much less discomfort and fewer withdrawal symptoms (nausea, diarrhea, etc.).
- Most people will continue to take their regular amount of non-prescription opioids until Day 7 of the low-dose initiation plan.

- The way you take buprenorphine-naloxone (Suboxone®) determines how well it works. If you don't hold the film under your tongue, it will not dissolve properly or be absorbed into your body.
- It is important to carefully follow the dosing schedule and only take the recommended amount of buprenorphine-naloxone (Suboxone®) each day. If you take more buprenorphine-naloxone (Suboxone®), you risk replacing other opioids in your system too quickly, which may cause severe withdrawal symptoms.
  - Some people may be concerned that the naloxone in this medication will make them feel sick, but it is actually when the buprenorphine replaces the other opioids too quickly that you may get feelings of sickness and withdrawal.

### **What are my instructions for taking buprenorphine-naloxone (Suboxone®)?**

1. Don't use nicotine products for 30 minutes before taking buprenorphine-naloxone (Suboxone®).
2. When you're ready to take your dose, take a sip of water to wet your mouth.
3. With clean, dry hands, cut the buprenorphine-naloxone (Suboxone®) film carefully to size based on your daily dose. Hold the film between 2 fingers by the outside edges.
  - See the schedule at the end of this handout for daily dose amounts and instructions for cutting the film.
  - There are two strengths of buprenorphine-naloxone (Suboxone®) films included in the kit (2 mg and 8 mg films). These films are separated into two different containers. Check the label on the outside of the container to make sure that you're using the correct strength for the day.

4. Place the correct daily dose of the buprenorphine-naloxone (Suboxone®) film under your tongue, to the left or right side (pictured).

5. Hold the film under your tongue until it is fully dissolved (this may take 5-10 minutes or longer).



- **Do not chew or swallow the film, and do not eat, drink, or talk until the film has dissolved completely.** If you do, your body will absorb less of the medication, so it will not work as well and may make your withdrawal symptoms worse.

6. After the film is completely dissolved, take a large sip of water, swish it gently around your teeth and gums, and swallow or spit the water out.

- Taking care of your mouth and teeth is very important when you're taking this medication. You should wait at least 1 hour after taking buprenorphine-naloxone (Suboxone®) before brushing your teeth to avoid damage to your teeth.

### **How can I manage any side effects from this treatment plan?**

- If you have nausea, you can take a medication called ondansetron which is included in your kit. This comes in tablets that you let dissolve on your tongue. Take one 4 mg dissolving tablet every 6 hours as needed.
- If you have diarrhea, you can take a medication called loperamide that comes in 2 mg pills and is included in your kit. Take 2 pills when you first have diarrhea and then take 1 pill after each loose stool. Do not take more than 8 pills (16 mg) in one day.
- If you continue to have nausea or diarrhea after Day 8 of your treatment plan, call the Addiction Consult Team at (734) 615-6203.

## **What should I do if I have severe withdrawal symptoms?**

- You may have severe withdrawal symptoms, called **precipitated withdrawal**, if you take more buprenorphine-naloxone (Suboxone®) than recommended each day. Severe symptoms may include aches and pains, vomiting, diarrhea, chills, stomach pains, yawning, runny nose, or watery eyes.
- If you experience severe withdrawal, call the Addiction Consult Team at (734) 615-6203. We may give you instructions to take an extra emergency dose of buprenorphine-naloxone (Suboxone®). If your symptoms do not get better after this, or if you're feeling extremely sick, you should go to the emergency room.

## **What are other ways to reduce my risk of harm from opioid use?**

- Included in your kit are testing strips for fentanyl and xylazine. It is important to know what is in your local drug supply to protect yourself from harm. Instructions for using these testing strips can be found on the back of the packaging.
- Supplies for safe injection technique are included in this kit, if needed.
- Avoid combining buprenorphine-naloxone (Suboxone®) with medications that make you sleepy. This may include Xanax®, Klonopin®, or Ambien®. Don't suddenly stop taking a benzodiazepine medication without talking with your provider first.
- Make sure that you carry Narcan® with you. Narcan® reverses the effects of opioids during an accidental overdose. You can get Narcan® for free from the vending machines outside of the emergency department.
- Keep your buprenorphine-naloxone (Suboxone®) in a safe place. Keep it away from children and other adults.

## Who should I contact for follow-up, or if I have questions or concerns?

- The Addiction Consult Team (ACT) will be reaching out to you to see how you are doing and help you arrange follow-up for continued buprenorphine-naloxone (Suboxone®) treatment.
  - While Michigan Medicine does not have a clinic for long-term buprenorphine-naloxone (Suboxone®) treatment, our team will help you find a local provider to continue your buprenorphine-naloxone (Suboxone®) treatment.
- We often refer people to Packard Health in Ypsilanti. If you would like to call them directly, the number is (734) 971-1073. If you have any questions, please call the ACT nurse at (734) 615-6203 on Monday through Friday from 7:00 AM – 4:00 PM. If you are unable to reach the nurse, please call the ACT social worker at (734) 803-2644.
- If you experience a crisis related to substance use or mental health, please call Community Mental Health for Washtenaw County at (734) 544-3050.

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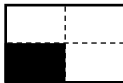
**Day 1**



- You can start Day 1 of your buprenorphine-naloxone (Suboxone®) low-dose initiation plan on the same day as your emergency department visit. You can take this dose in addition to any doses you were given in the emergency department on the same day.
- You may continue using non-prescription opioids.



Morning	Noon	Evening
 <p>Take a quarter (<math>\frac{1}{4}</math>) of a 2 mg film. Wrap and save the leftover film for tomorrow's dose.</p>	---	---




**Day 2**



- You may continue using non-prescription opioids.
- At the end of Day 2, you will have a quarter of a 2 mg film left over. You may wrap and save this for a later day if withdrawal symptoms increase and additional buprenorphine-naloxone (Suboxone®) is needed.




Morning	Noon	Evening
 <p>Take a quarter (<math>\frac{1}{4}</math>) of a 2 mg film. Wrap and save the leftover film for your evening dose.</p>	---	 <p>Take a quarter (<math>\frac{1}{4}</math>) of a 2 mg film.</p>




Day 3		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You may continue using non-prescription opioids.</li> </ul>		
Morning	Noon	Evening
 <p>Take half (1/2) of a 2 mg film. Wrap and save the leftover film for your evening dose.</p>	---	 <p>Take half (1/2) of a 2 mg film.</p>

Day 4		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You may continue using non-prescription opioids.</li> </ul>		
Morning	Noon	Evening
 <p>Take one whole 2 mg film.</p>	---	 <p>Take one whole 2 mg film.</p>

Day 5		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You may continue using non-prescription opioids.</li> </ul>		
Morning	Noon	Evening
 <p>Take one whole 2 mg film.</p>	 <p>Take one whole 2 mg film.</p>	 <p>Take one whole 2 mg film.</p>

Day 6		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Today, you will switch to taking 8 mg films (instead of 2 mg films).</li> <li>You may continue using non-prescription opioids.</li> </ul>		
Morning	Noon	Evening
 <p>Take half (½) of an 8 mg film. Wrap and save the leftover film for your evening dose.</p>	---	 <p>Take half (½) of an 8 mg film.</p>

Day 7		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Stop taking all non-prescription opioids.</b></li> </ul>		
Morning	Noon	Evening
 <p>Take two whole 8 mg films.</p>	 <p>Take one whole 8 mg film.</p>	 <p>Take one whole 8 mg film.</p>

Day 8 and beyond		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Stop taking all non-prescription opioids.</b></li> </ul>		
Morning	Noon	Evening
 <p>Take one whole 8 mg film.</p>	 <p>Take one whole 8 mg film.</p>	 <p>Take one whole 8 mg film.</p>