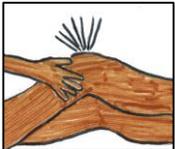


## What is buprenorphine?

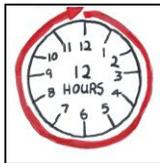
**Buprenorphine** is an opioid medication used to treat opioid use disorder (OUD). It's different from other opioids in that it is **slow-acting** and **long-lasting**, relieving opioid cravings and withdrawal symptoms for a full 24 hours **without making you feel high**. Because it lasts for a long time, you only have to take it once a day, so you won't experience withdrawal every few hours.

## When can I start it?



Before taking your first dose, make sure that you are in **opioid withdrawal** (achy joints and muscles, an upset stomach, goosebumps, and intense anxiety/irritability). If you take buprenorphine before withdrawal starts, it will make you feel **very sick**.

Usually, it takes several hours (12 hours or longer) after you have last used an opioid to go into withdrawal. This can take even longer if you have taken methadone. It is best to wait to take your first dose of buprenorphine until you are **positive** that you're in opioid withdrawal.



## When should I see my doctor?

You should see your doctor within a couple of days of starting buprenorphine so that they can see how you're doing. You should tell your doctor if you've been having any cravings, withdrawal symptoms, or side effects since starting buprenorphine – your dose might need to be adjusted slightly. Connecting with your doctor will also give you a chance to talk more about how buprenorphine fits into your overall plan for OUD treatment.

**Your follow-up appointment has been booked for**

---

## How can I learn more?

If you have any questions or problems before your appointment, you should contact us at

---

For more information and resources, visit [www.metaphi.ca/patient-resources.html](http://www.metaphi.ca/patient-resources.html)

**METAPHI**  
MENTORING, EDUCATION, AND  
CLINICAL TOOLS FOR ADDICTION:  
PRIMARY CARE – HOSPITAL INTEGRATION

## How to start buprenorphine



**Buprenorphine** is a medication that is used to treat opioid use disorder. Most patients start off taking it once a day at their pharmacy. Some patients may eventually get some doses to take home if they are doing well.

Your doctor has prescribed you the first few doses of buprenorphine to take at home to get you started on treatment. This guide will explain how to safely start buprenorphine at home.

Author: Dr. Anita Srivastava  
Illustrators: Megan Nguyen, Akash Yoon

## How will I know I'm in withdrawal?

You can use the **Subjective Opioid Withdrawal Scale** in order to figure out your level of withdrawal. Score each of the items below from **0 (not at all)** to **4 (extremely)** based on how you feel now:

### Score (0-4)

- I feel anxious.
- I feel like yawning.
- I am perspiring.
- My eyes are teary.
- My nose is running.
- I have goosebumps.
- I am shaking.
- I have hot flushes.
- I have cold flushes.
- My bones and muscles ache.
- I feel restless.
- I feel nauseous.
- I feel like vomiting.
- My muscles twitch.
- I have stomach cramps.
- I feel like using now.

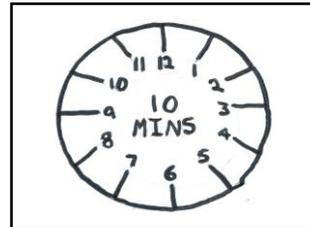
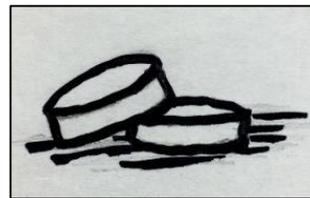
### TOTAL:

If your score is **17+**, it should be safe to take your first dose of buprenorphine. If your score is **16 or less**, wait an hour and then take the test again.

## How do I take my first dose?

Your first dose will be either 2mg (one tablet) or 4 mg (two tablets). Your doctor will tell you how much to take. Place the tablet(s) **under** your tongue and wait for them to dissolve – this can take up to ten minutes. Taking a sip of water to moisten your mouth before you put the medication under your tongue may help it dissolve faster.

- **Do not swallow** the medication: it won't work.
- **Do not mix** with alcohol, opioids, or benzodiazepines (like diazepam or lorazepam).
- **Do not drive** until your doctor says it's okay.



## When do I take my next dose?

You should start to feel better within an hour or two of your first dose. If you feel well, don't take any more and see how you feel the next day.

If you're still feeling sick after two hours, take another one or two tablets **under** your tongue. You can take one or two tablets hours to a maximum of 16mg (eight tablets) on the first day.



Do not take more than 16 mg (eight tablets) on the first day or in the first 24 hours.

## How much do I take on the second day?

If you felt fine on the total dose that you took over the course of the first day, you should take the same dose all at once on the second day.

If the amount you took on the first day didn't completely control your withdrawal, take an additional 2–4 mg (one or two tablets) on the second day. If you feel a bit drowsy on the second day, reduce your dose by 2–4 mg (one or two tablets).

If you are **very sleepy**, stop the medication and see your doctor as soon as possible.

