

Medications To Support Wholistic Substance Use Care

SUBOXONE

What is Suboxone?

Suboxone is an opioid agonist medication that is used to treat opioid use disorder by helping to manage cravings for opioids and stop symptoms of withdrawal.

Suboxone is the brand name of two medications: Buprenorphine and Naloxone. Naloxone is added to prevent the medication from being taken by a different route. When taken under the tongue, the Naloxone is not activated, however if it is snorted or injected it becomes active and can cause withdrawal.

It is long acting, which means it works slowly in your body. Once you reach a stable dose of Suboxone, you can take it once daily.

Starting your journey

Before you are prescribed Suboxone, you will be asked about the substances you use and your health. You may also be asked to do blood work, a urine test, and possibly other tests as part of your wellness plan.

Your starting dose will depend on your current substance use. In the past, starting Suboxone meant that you had to be in withdrawal before taking your first dose. Today there are options available that do not require this, for example, “low-dose” or “micro-dose” starts.

You and your health care provider can discuss an approach that works for your comfort level. Sometimes your care provider can prescribe small doses of other opioid agonist therapy medications or safer supply medications to make your induction more comfortable.

Taking Suboxone

Suboxone comes as a tablet that dissolves under your tongue. Try not to swallow, talk, eat, smoke, or drink until the tablet is gone. It can take up to 10 minutes for the tablet to completely dissolve. It is important not to swallow or chew the tablet, as it will not work properly.

When you start Suboxone, you may need to get your doses every day from a pharmacy or health centre. If getting to the pharmacy is a barrier for you, ask your provider if you can take home a starter pack. Many people stay on Suboxone for a long time, as it supports their overall wellness. Some people may also switch to a different type of medication- you can always talk to your provider about your options.

When you begin taking Suboxone, your doses will be increased over time to find the best dose for you. If you feel cravings during this time, or are taking opioids to manage them, talk to your health care provider.

There is also a long acting monthly injectable version of this medication and you can discuss this option with your provider.

Missed doses

It is important to take your Suboxone medication every day. When you miss a dose, you may experience increased cravings, and decreased tolerance to the medication.

For your safety, your dose may need to be adjusted by your health care provider if you miss 4-5 days in a row. To receive a new prescription, reach out to your care provider as soon as possible. Discuss any extra supports you may need to stay on the medication.

Urine drug test

Urine drug tests are a part of your treatment. They are completely confidential and will not be shared with anybody. They are only used by your care provider to develop your treatment plan.

Suboxone will not be refused if other substances are found in your urine. All test results are used for planning and supporting your care and goals



Side Effects

Everyone's journey with Suboxone will look different. As with most medications, you may experience some side effects. Suboxone often has less side effects than other opioid medications.

Side effects may include:

- Constipation or upset stomach
- Headache
- Excessive sweating
- Nausea and/or vomiting

It is important to report any side effects to your health care provider or pharmacist so they can support you to reduce them.

Rare but Serious Side Effects:

- **Liver or Other Organ Issues**
Your doctor may request blood tests to assess the function of your liver and other organs both before and after you begin taking this medication.
- **Serotonin Syndrome**
This can occur when there is an excess of a brain chemical called serotonin in your body.

Early signs may include confusion, agitation, muscle twitching, sweating, shivering, or diarrhea. Severe symptoms can involve a high fever, seizures, irregular heartbeats, or fainting.

If you notice any early symptoms, **seek emergency care** right away. For serious symptoms, **call 911** immediately.

Managing Side Effects

Water

Drinking plenty of water can help with a number of side effects including excessive sweating, nausea, vomiting and bowel issues.

Sleep

Sleep is an important part of your wellness journey and if you are having difficulty sleeping it is important to let your health care provider know. Some ways to help improve your sleep include getting regular exercise, eating a small snack before bed, and developing a bedtime routine.

Over-the-counter medications

Some common medications can help with symptoms, such as Ibuprofen for pain, or Gravol for nausea. Let your health care provider know about any over-the-counter medications you are taking, and ask about ways these might help manage side effects.

Culture and community

Connection to culture and community can help support your health and wellness. This will look different for everyone but may include connecting with Elders or Traditional Knowledge Keepers in your community, taking part in land-based healing programs, or finding an activity that you enjoy.

Stress management

Starting a new routine around taking Suboxone can cause a wide range of feelings and managing unwanted side effects may be stressful. If you are transitioning away from using unregulated opioids, you may experience many emotional and physical changes. Learning how to work with these emotions and thoughts can support you in your wellness journey.

It may be helpful to take five minute breaks throughout the day. Some activities that you can practice in these breaks include:

- Stretching
- Deep breathing
- Meditation
- Drawing
- Listening to music
- Going for a walk
- Doing an activity you enjoy
- Speak to someone you trust



Wellness

Wellness is a balance of many factors, and as you begin your journey with Suboxone it can be helpful to take some time to consider the ways that you can take care of your mental, emotional, physical and spiritual wellness. Continue to talk to your care provider about your goals for being on Suboxone and how this relates to your overall wellness.

MENTAL

EMOTIONAL

PHYSICAL

SPIRITUAL

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

Staying safe

While taking Suboxone it is important to let your health care provider know of any other medications or substances you may be taking. Some substances, such as alcohol or benzodiazepines, may increase your risk of both complications and / or overdose.

Always take your medication as prescribed to minimize risk of overdose. If your health status changes, please talk to your prescriber.

Please don't stop your OAT without support from your prescriber as it can cause withdrawals and increase risk of overdose if you use opioids.

If you are using other substances while prescribed Suboxone we recommend following harm reduction strategies:

- Don't use alone. Use with a buddy.
- Go to an overdose prevention site or use the Lifeguard app.
- Get your drugs checked if possible.
- Use a test dose: start low and go slow.
- Have a naloxone kit and know how to use it.
- Access new drug use equipment and don't share supplies.
- Use caution when mixing substances.

