



**Buprenorphine for Treating
Opioid Use Disorder:
Information for Patients and Families**

Buprenorphine (referred to as bupe, pronounced “byoop,” and by brand names such as Suboxone and Zubsolv) is a medication for treating opioid use disorder (OUD). OUD is a chronic health condition defined as a problematic pattern of opioid use (such as the use of heroin, fentanyl or prescription pain relievers) that leads to serious impairment or distress. Bupe has been used for more than 20 years to treat OUD, is safe for long-term use and protects against opioid overdose.



Read this booklet to learn about:

- **Bupe basics (including benefits and how it works)**
- **How to prevent overdose**
- **Frequently asked questions about bupe**
- **How to access bupe**
- **How to talk to a health care provider about bupe**
- **Your rights while taking bupe**



Bupe Basics

Bupe is usually prescribed as a daily pill or dissolvable film that goes under the tongue. It can also be given as a weekly or monthly injection.

Most oral forms of bupe also contain naloxone, a medication that reverses the effects of an opioid overdose when injected or used as a nasal spray. Naloxone has no effect when taken orally and is added to bupe to prevent people from taking bupe in ways other than as prescribed.

Benefits of Bupe

The benefits of bupe include:

- Reducing the risk of opioid overdose
- Reducing withdrawal symptoms and cravings
- Helping support overall health
- Being able to be taken conveniently at home (in most cases)

How Bupe Works

Bupe is a partial opioid agonist, meaning it works the same way as other opioids but to a lesser extent. For people with opioid tolerance, bupe provides relief from opioid withdrawal and cravings without producing a “high.”

Bupe has a “ceiling effect.” After taking a certain amount, taking more bupe will not produce a high or cause respiratory depression (slowed or shallow breathing). This makes the risk of overdosing on bupe much lower compared with other opioids.



How To Prevent Overdose

Overdoses involving bupe are rare. They usually occur among people with low or no opioid tolerance or who have used multiple depressants (drugs that slow breathing). To further reduce your risk of overdose while taking bupe, avoid using depressants, such as alcohol, sedatives and tranquilizers.

Your risk of overdose increases if you stop taking bupe and use any opioids or drugs from the unregulated drug supply, such as fentanyl. Fentanyl is a powerful opioid that is commonly found in drugs sold as heroin. It has also been found in non-opioid substances, such as powder and crack cocaine, methamphetamine, and pills from nonmedical sources.

To reduce your general risk of overdose:

- Test your drugs with fentanyl test strips.
- Avoid using more than one drug at a time.
- Avoid using drugs alone, or have someone with naloxone nearby.

To learn how to use naloxone and receive a free naloxone kit, visit nyc.gov/naloxone or call **311**.



Frequently Asked Questions About Bupe

Is bupe right for me?

Although no single treatment is right for everyone, many people find that bupe helps reduce their withdrawal symptoms and cravings. Talk to your provider about whether bupe is a good option for you.

What are common side effects of bupe?

Side effects are usually mild and can include constipation, nausea, headache, and difficulty falling or staying asleep.

How long do I need to take bupe?

You should take bupe for as long as it helps you meet your goals, which can mean years or even your entire life. Research shows better outcomes for people who take bupe for longer periods of time.

Is counseling or therapy required to take bupe?

No, but many people benefit from counseling or therapy while taking bupe.

Will I experience withdrawal symptoms if I start taking bupe?

Before starting bupe, you will need to stop using other opioids long enough to go into mild to moderate withdrawal. Bupe will help reduce withdrawal symptoms. How long it takes to reach mild to moderate withdrawal depends on factors such as the type of opioids you used and when you last used them.

Talk to your provider about when and where is best to take your first dose of bupe. Taking bupe too soon after

taking another opioid can cause sudden, intense opioid withdrawal symptoms (called “precipitated withdrawal”). Precipitated withdrawal with bupe is very rare and can be avoided with the right dose and by taking bupe as prescribed.

People who have used drugs containing xylazine, whether intentionally or unintentionally, might experience xylazine withdrawal symptoms. Xylazine is not an opioid, so bupe will not address these symptoms.

Is bupe covered by health insurance?

Yes. Medicaid, Medicare and most other health insurance plans pay for bupe. Check with your health insurance plan to make sure bupe is on the list of approved drugs. Common brand names for bupe are Suboxone and Zubsolv. If you have a copayment, you may be eligible for manufacturers coupons, discount cards or patient assistance programs.

What are other medications for treating OUD?

Bupe and methadone are the most effective treatments for OUD. They are the only medications shown to reduce the risk of fatal overdose. Extended-release injectable naltrexone is another option for treating OUD but has not been shown to reduce the risk of overdose. Talk to your provider about the risks and benefits to help decide which is best for you.



How To Access Bupe

There are many ways people can access bupe in NYC:

- Talk to your **health care provider**, as many physicians, nurse practitioners, physician assistants and psychiatrists prescribe bupe or can refer you to a provider who does.
 - For help finding a provider, call **311** or 844-NYC-4NYC (844-692-4692).
 - For help finding bupe treatment and OUD-related care management in primary care settings, visit **nyc.gov/health/map**, click **Drug and Alcohol Services** and select **Buprenorphine Treatment (With Nurse Care Manager)**.
 - Contact **NYC Health + Hospitals' Virtual ExpressCare** at 631-EXP-Care (631-397-2273), 24/7, or visit **expresscare.nyc**.
- Go to a **syringe service program** for on-site or telehealth treatment or referral to a bupe provider.
 - Visit **nyc.gov/health** and search for **syringe service programs**.
- Go to a **New York State-licensed treatment program** at **findaddictiontreatment.ny.gov**.
- Go to an **emergency department** for an emergency supply of bupe.
- Contact **988** for substance use support and referral to care.
 - Call or text 988 or chat at **nyc.gov/988**.



How To Talk to a Health Care Provider About Bupe

Before Your First Appointment

When looking for a provider who offers bupe, you can contact them first to ask about their services. You do not need to share your name or any personal information during the initial call. Mention that you are exploring treatment options for OUD and want to speak to someone who can best answer these questions to help you decide whether you want to start treatment with that provider:

- Do you offer bupe or any other medications for opioid use disorder?
- Are there any requirements for starting bupe?
- Do you accept my health insurance?
- How do you work with people who do not have health insurance?
- What documentation or identification do I need to bring to my first appointment?
- How soon after my first appointment can I expect to start bupe?
- What pharmacy coordination services do you offer?
- What additional services do you offer?

During Your First Appointment

The process for starting bupe can vary depending on the provider. During your first appointment, the provider will likely ask you about your health (such as your current or past medical conditions, opioid use, and living situation) and give you a physical exam (including blood work) to make sure it is safe for you to take bupe.

Together, you and the provider will develop a treatment plan that includes setting goals and identifying any additional services you would like to participate in.

When discussing bupe treatment with your provider, consider asking:

- Will I take my first dose at home or your office?
- How often will I need to take urine or other drug tests?
 - What happens if I test positive for opioids or other substances?
- How often will I need to have follow-up appointments?
- What happens if I miss an appointment?
- How can I contact you if I have questions, need refills or experience side effects, especially after office hours?
- What are my options if I lose or run out of my medication before my next appointment?
- How will my confidentiality be protected?



Your Rights While Taking Bupe

It is illegal to discriminate against someone for taking medication for OUD, including bupe. In most cases, people who take medication for OUD are protected by law from discrimination. These protections extend to:

- **Employment**

- Most employers must provide reasonable accommodations to employees who take medication for OUD, such as shifting work hours to accommodate appointments.
- Most employers cannot fire or deny a job offer to someone who takes medication for OUD.

- **Housing**

- It is illegal to refuse to rent or sell housing to someone who takes medication for OUD.
- Recovery residences with policies that make it difficult for someone who takes medication for OUD to live there must provide reasonable accommodations, such as arranging a secure location for medication storage.

- **Health care settings**

- Health care providers, including long-term care facilities, cannot deny medical treatment to someone who takes medication for OUD.

- **Child welfare**

- People cannot be required to stop taking medication for OUD to maintain custody of, reunite with or visit their children.

- **Government services**

- Government agencies cannot deny services or benefits to someone who takes medication for OUD.

- **Criminal legal system**

- People have the right to take medication for OUD while on probation or parole.

If you take bupe or another medication for OUD and believe you are being discriminated against, contact the:

- **NYC Commission on Human Rights:** Call 212-416-0197 or visit nyc.gov/site/cchr/about/report-discrimination.page.
- **Legal Action Center:** Call 212-243-1313 or visit lac.org.
- **New York State Division of Human Rights:** Call 888-392-3644 or visit dhr.ny.gov/complaint.

For more information on bupe for OUD, visit nyc.gov/health and search for **bupe treatment**.

For mental health or substance use support, call or text 988 or chat at nyc.gov/988. Text and chat services are available in English and Spanish, and counselors are available by phone 24/7 in more than 200 languages.

