

Integrative Medical Institute
1440 East Chapman Avenue
Orange, CA, 92866

UNDERSTANDING OPIOID DEPENDENCE

SUBOXONE® (buprenorphine HCl/naloxone HCl dihydrate) sublingual tablet

Opioid dependence is a disease in which there are biological or physical, psychological, and social changes. Some of the physical changes include the need for increasing amounts of opioid to produce the same effect, symptoms of withdrawal, feelings of craving, and changes in sleep patterns. Psychological components of opioid dependence include a reliance on heroin or other drugs to help you cope with everyday problems or inability to feel good or celebrate without using heroin or opioids. The social components of opioid dependence include less frequent contact with important people in your life, and an inability to participate in important events due to drug use. In extreme cases, there may even be criminal and legal implications

The hallmarks of opioid dependence are the continued use of drugs despite their negative affect, the need for increasing amounts of opioids to have the same effect and the development of withdrawal symptoms upon cessation.

There are a variety of factors than can contribute to the continued use of opioids. Among these are the use of heroin to escape from or cope with problems, the need to use increasing amounts of heroin to achieve the same effect, and the need for a "high."

Treatment

Treatment for opioid dependence is best considered a long-term process.

Recovery from opioid dependence is not an easy or painless process, as it involves changes in drug use and lifestyle, such as adopting new coping skills. Recovery can involve hard work, commitment, discipline, and a willingness to examine the effects of opioid dependence on your life. At first, it isn't unusual to feel impatient, angry, or frustrated.

The changes you need to make will depend on how opioid dependence has specifically affected your life. The following are some of the common areas of change to think about when developing your specific recovery plan:

Physical – good nutrition, exercise, sleep and relaxation.

Emotional – learning to cope with feelings, problems, stresses and negative thinking without relying on opioids.

Social – developing relationships with sober people, learning to resist pressures from others to use or misuse substances, and developing healthy social and leisure interests to occupy your time and give you a sense of satisfaction and pleasure.

Family – examining the impact opioid dependence has had on your family, encouraging them to get involved in your treatment, mending relationships with family members, and working hard to have mutually satisfying relationships with family members.

Spiritual – learning to listen to your inner voice for support and strength, and using that voice to guide you in developing a renewed sense of purpose and meaning.

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EXPLANATION OF TREATMENT—AMAM
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Intake

You will be given a comprehensive substance dependence assessment, as well as an evaluation of mental status and physical exam. The pros and cons of the medication, SUBOXONE, will be presented. Treatment expectations, as well as issues involved with maintenance versus medically supervised withdrawal will be discussed.

This office will store and dispense your SUBOXONE prescription for the duration of treatment; these procedures will be explained in more depth at the first visit.

Induction

You will be switched from your current opioid (heroin, methadone or prescription painkillers) on to SUBOXONE. At the time of induction, you will be asked to provide a urine sample to confirm the presence of opioids and possibly other drugs. You must arrive for the first visit experiencing mild to moderate opioid withdrawal symptoms. Your response to the initial dose will be monitored. You may receive additional medication, if necessary, to reduce withdrawal symptoms.

Since an individual's tolerance and reactions to SUBOXONE vary, daily appointments may be scheduled and medications will be adjusted until you no longer experience withdrawal symptoms or cravings. Urine drug screening is typically required for all patients at every visit during this phase.

Intake and Induction may both occur at the first visit, depending on your needs and your doctor's evaluation.

Stabilization

Once the appropriate dose of SUBOXONE is established, you will stay at this dose until steady blood levels are achieved. You and your doctor will discuss your treatment options from this point forward.

Maintenance

Treatment compliance and progress will be monitored. Participation in some form of behavioral counseling is strongly recommended to ensure best chance of treatment success. Your doctor will check your progress weekly, and you will receive your weekly dose of SUBOXONE only during these regular visits. However, if treatment progress is good and goals are met, monthly visits will eventually be considered sufficient. The Maintenance phase can last from weeks to years—the length of treatment will be determined by you and your doctor, and, possibly, your counselor. Your length of treatment may vary depending on your individual needs.

Medically Supervised Withdrawal

As your treatment progresses, you and your doctor may eventually decide that medically supervised withdrawal is an appropriate option for you. In this phase, your doctor will gradually taper your SUBOXONE dose over time, taking care to see that you do not experience any withdrawal symptoms or cravings.

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During the treatment process, SUBOXONE will help you avoid many or all of the physical symptoms of opioid withdrawal. These typically include craving, restlessness, poor sleep, irritability, yawning, muscle cramps, runny nose, tearing, goose-flesh, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea. Your doctor may prescribe other medications for you as necessary to help relieve these symptoms.

You should be careful not to respond to these withdrawal symptoms by losing patience with the treatment process and thinking that the symptoms can only be corrected by using drugs. To help you deal with the symptoms of withdrawal, you should try to set small goals and work towards them.