

THINKING ABOUT INJECTABLE “SUBS” (BUPRENORPHINE)?

FAQ ABOUT INJECTABLE BUPRENORPHINE FOR PATIENTS



WHAT IS IT?

Rather than taking your buprenorphine under the tongue everyday, this injection is a liquid containing form, which is injected, available as a once-a-month injection under the skin in your abdomen. This is near the area around your “belly button.”

HOW DOES IT WORK?

After the injection, the medication is slowly released into your body over one month. Think of it like filling your car with gas that you only need to go once-a-month to fill up rather than filling up everyday. Think of that gas as important to keep you “feeling” normal. You get the most out of the dose 1-day after the injection, works for 1 month, before you need another injection next month. This injection may keep your cravings down so you can better focus on your recovery and the important things in your life, rather than worrying about feeling “sick” and the next time you need another dose of “buprenorphine.”

DOES IT WORK THE WAY IT SHOULD RIGHT AWAY?

Since the injection takes time to build to a level that is best to protect you from overdoses, it may take 4-6 once-a-month injections before the levels are completely steady. Especially in the beginning, your doctor might still give you some buprenorphine to dissolve under-the-tongue. Even after 1 or 2 injections, you are still very protected from overdosing.

HOW DOES IT WORK DIFFERENTLY FROM THE BUPRENORPHINE YOU DISSOLVE UNDER THE TONGUE?

If you need to take buprenorphine under the tongue everyday, the level of it in your body does not stay stable. It depends on you taking it as your doctor tells you to. Taking the buprenorphine everyday keeps the level above what is needed to keep you from overdosing on opioids BUT the level doesn't stay high enough for a long time. If you miss doses, you may be at higher risk of feeling “sick” or get cravings that could lead you to overdose if those levels fall too low. With the injectable buprenorphine, that level stays steady and at a high level since it is slowly released. You don't have to worry about taking your dose everyday.

IS THE INJECTABLE BUPRENORPHINE BEST FOR ME?

For ANYONE who is already on buprenorphine OR who wants to get off opioids BUT are having trouble, this injection may be an option for you. You and your doctor should talk about your treatment goals. It may be the best option for people who have any one of the following conditions:

- » Have had trouble with staying off opioids even when taking the usual buprenorphine, especially if your goal is to get off drugs.
- » Use opioids bought off the street since they often have fentanyl, which is an extremely dangerous and powerful opioid. Those who use prescription opioids can still use the injectable buprenorphine as treatment.
- » Want a medication that gives you protection for an opioid overdose if you continue to use opioids (whether you want to or not) or those who have stayed “sober” but want that extra protection.
- » For those who don't want to take their buprenorphine strips or pills everyday, or have difficulty remembering to take their medications on a schedule.

WHAT ARE THE SIDE EFFECTS?

Side-effects may occur just like with other medications. Overall, this medication is very safe and works well and if it were NOT, it would not be available to treat your condition.

You may experience a small “lump” at the site where you get the injection but this “lump” will go away over time. It is perfectly normal to experience this but you DO NOT want to rub or massage that site or the injection might not work the way it should. Doing so will also NOT make the medication release faster. Other side-effects you may feel are headache, sleepy, nausea/vomiting, dizziness, constipation, injection site pain/itching, but should go away with time. These are similar side-effects to buprenorphine. Should you experience these symptoms many days of the month, you should call your doctor. Any time you feel faint, confused, uncoordinated, slurred speech, blurred vision, are wheezing, and other urgent symptoms, please get medical help right away.



HOW DO I GET THE INJECTABLE BUPRENORPHINE?

Since the injectable may be used for anyone with an opioid addiction, your doctor may have already talked about the medication with you. You may also ask your doctor if it is best for you. Your doctor may give you some instructions on what to do before getting the first dose, including taking the usual buprenorphine to make sure you don't react or feel more “sick” when you get the injection.

You will need to fill out some paperwork for the doctor and may take a few weeks before the doctor gets the injectable for you in the office. This medication is not available for you to pick up at your local pharmacy so you need to make sure you stay on top of instructions and information your doctor needs to get it for you. If the doctor reaches out to you, make sure to pick-up and/or return the call in order to help you get the injection as soon as possible.

WHAT SHOULD I HAVE IN CASE OF AN EMERGENCY?

Always make sure you have naloxone (Narcan) available should you overdose. Whether it is a nasal spray or an injection, make sure your friend or family member knows how to use it. Hopefully, the medication prevents you from using drugs but if you do, always make sure you do not use alone. Although the injection protects you from overdosing, there is always a risk.

IS THERE ANYTHING I SHOULD AVOID TAKING?

Generally, you should avoid other medications or drugs that make you feel sleepy or tired and increase the risk of an overdose and death. That means, you should avoid other opioids, drinking alcohol, taking “benzos”, and muscle relaxants. For more information, please talk with your doctor about these risks.

WHAT WILL I FEEL DURING OR AFTER THE INJECTION?

You may expect some burning where you get the injection since it is a deep injection under the skin. The burning sensation may last for around 30 minutes after the injection but should go away. To help with this, your doctor may help with “numbing” the area before the injection. Ask your doctor about options to help prevent pain. After the injection, you may place an ice-pack covered by a towel on the site. Do NOT directly apply an ice-pack to the injection site.



MEDICATION-ASSISTED TREATMENT
CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE



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REFERENCES:

- 1) Sublocade Package Insert:
<https://www.sublocade.com/Content/pdf/medication-guide.pdf>
- 2) CA Bridge Program; What You Need to Know:
<https://cabridge.org/resource/buprenorphine-extended-release-what-you-need-to-know/>
- 3) CA Bridge Program; After Injection Patient Discharge Instructions