

Why talk about buprenorphine/naloxone (Suboxone®)?

GPs can prescribe Suboxone® for up to 5 patients without prior accredited Opioid Replacement Therapy (ORT) training or the need to register as an ORT provider with the Department of Health and Human Services (Drugs and Poisons Unit).

(Note: Methadone requires formal ORT training prior to prescribing)

This Policy change in Jan 2013 provides:

- opportunity for shared care with specialists
- opportunity for ongoing management of patients stabilised on therapy
- level of practice contained by limit on patient numbers
- access to full ORT training remains readily available if required (> 5 Suboxone® patients, methadone prescribing)

Buprenorphine/Naloxone sublingual film is indicated for the treatment of opioid dependence within a framework of medical, social and psychological treatment. Dose administration is supervised by the dispensing pharmacy. Suboxone® is a Schedule 8 drug, thus regulations and permits apply.

Active Ingredients: 4:1 fixed dose combination of Buprenorphine and Naloxone

Buprenorphine

Reduces withdrawal symptoms and craving for opioids in opioid dependence

- Sublingual bioavailability is 30-55%
- higher affinity for mu-receptor than heroin or other opioids
 - displaces opioids and blocks their effect
 - reduces self-administration of heroin and other opioids
- Partial agonist at mu-receptor
- ceiling effect on maximal opioid activity including respiratory depression
 - but beware with alcohol and BZPs
 - better safety profile compared with methadone
 - reduced potential for overdose
 - rapid induction is possible

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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- Displaces other opioids
 - Start when early withdrawal signs are present
- Slow dissociation from mu-receptor
 - Terminal elimination half-life of 24 to 37 hours
 - Enables alternate day and 3 days a week regimes
- Blocks the action of other opioids
 - Reduced potential for continued heroin/other opioid use

Onset and Duration of Response to Buprenorphine

Onset of effects	30-60 minutes
Peak clinical effects	1-4 hours
Duration of effects	8-12 hours at low dose (e.g. 2mg)
	24-72 hours at high dose (e.g. >16mg)

Buprenorphine / naloxone (Suboxone®) Sublingual film

Available as 2 mg / 0.5mg and 8 mg/ 2mg sub-lingual film

(in contrast to Temgesic® S/L tablets for pain = 0.2 mg buprenorphine and Norspan® 20mg Patch = releases 0.480 mg buprenorphine per day)

Naloxone

Competitive antagonist at opioid receptors

Present in the formulation to reduce misuse (injection, diversion) of Suboxone®

- Bioavailability of naloxone from the sub-lingual film is < 10%, thus negligible naloxone effect via this route

But...

- If Suboxone® is injected by an opioid dependent person, the naloxone component will have a substantial effect and precipitate unpleasant withdrawal symptoms or have less opioid effect than buprenorphine alone.

Further information is also available at <https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/drugs-and-poisons/pharmacotherapy/buprenorphine-and-naloxone-prescribing-guidelines>