



**PMS**

PRESBYTERIAN MEDICAL SERVICES



**Are you ready to stop  
the cycle of misusing opioids?**

*There is no day like today!*

## **STARTING BUPRENORPHINE: A Step by Step Guide**

### **Step 1: Stop Using Opioids**

- Pain pills (including Tramadol), heroin, kratom: Stop for 12–24 hours
- Fentanyl: Stop for 24–36 hours
- Methadone: Stop for >48 hours
- During this waiting period, withdrawal symptoms will begin
- Use the COWS (Clinical Opiate Withdrawal Scale) or SOWS (Subjective Opiate Withdrawal Scale) to measure severity
  - You need moderate withdrawal (score > 11) before starting buprenorphine
  - Your provider may give you Scales to use, also available at:  
[www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK143183/](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK143183/)



### **Step 2: Manage Withdrawal Symptoms**

- Use medications (see advice below) to ease symptoms
- Always follow the instructions on the medication bottles
- Stay hydrated, rest, and begin treatment around supportive people if possible

### **Step 3: Taking Buprenorphine**

- Buprenorphine is only effective when absorbed by the blood vessels in your mouth
- Any liquid that you swallow that dissolves from the strip is not active
- Place strip (or tablet) under your tongue and allow it to dissolve for 15 minutes
- Do not eat, drink, or chew gum for 30 minutes afterwards
- After 30 minutes, swish water in your mouth to rinse your teeth

## Step 4: Standard Dosing (Your provider may alter this advice)

- Begin once you've waited for the required time and reached moderate withdrawal
- Initial dose: Take 2 mg (cut  $\frac{1}{2}$  of a 4 mg or  $\frac{1}{4}$  of an 8 mg strip to get this dose)
  - If symptoms worsen quickly → Stop, wait at least 6 hours, and retry later
  - Use withdrawal medications during this time as needed
- If symptoms do not worsen → take another 2 mg after 1 hour
- After another 1 hour, you may take 4 mg every 1-2 hours until all withdrawal symptoms remain under control
- Usually, you'll need approximately 16 mg total in the first 24 hours
- On Day 2, take the total used on Day 1, either in one dose or split in two

We are  
in this journey  
together!



## Important Notes

- Use withdrawal medications to help during waiting periods
- Always follow your provider's instructions for dosing and symptom management
- Contact your provider if you have any questions or concerns

## Medications to Support You During Withdrawal & Initiation

### Anxiety and Restlessness (these meds might also help other symptoms)

- Hydroxyzine 25-50 mg up to 4 times per day
- Clonidine 0.1 mg 3 times per day
- Lofexidine 0.18 mg 4 times per day

### Gut symptoms - Cramps, Nausea, Diarrhea

- Ondansetron 4 mg under your tongue every 4 hours
- Loperamide for diarrhea 2-4 mg up to 4 times per day

### Aches and Pain

- Tylenol or ibuprofen

