

Medication for Opioid Use Disorder

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HEALing Communities Study
Ohio

IMPORTANCE

When your family member or friend becomes addicted to drugs, it is incredibly difficult and painful for everyone who cares about them.

When someone with drug problems enters treatment, there is hope. At the same time, there might also be fear that treatment will not work, and the person will end up right back where they started. For this reason, it can be hard to believe that change is possible.

The fact is that support from family, friends, and community will do a lot to increase the chances of long-term recovery. Your support and encouragement matter. A good first step is to learn more about your loved one's disease, their treatment, and how you can support them.

ABOUT OPIOID USE DISORDER AND MEDICATION TREATMENT

Drug addiction is a chronic disease of the brain. It can be treated, and people can get better. In fact, doctors who specialize in drug addiction call it "opioid use disorder" because it is a treatable disease.

Doctors have found that the most effective and reliable way to get better from drug addiction is to use medications that treat cravings. When someone is treated with medications for opioid use disorder (MOUD), it does not substitute one drug for another. For example, the medications buprenorphine and methadone help reduce withdrawal symptoms and cravings. These medications restore balance to the brain circuits affected by addiction, allowing the patient's brain to heal while working toward recovery.

Myths about MOUD

Some common beliefs about MOUD **that just aren't true:**

- MOUD is not real recovery
- MOUD is replacing one drug for another
- MOUD should only be a short term solution
- MOUD is for weak-willed people
- MOUD should always be taken at a clinic so patients don't try to sell it on the street.

Medications such as methadone, buprenorphine (Suboxone, Sublocade, Subutex), and naltrexone (Vivitrol) can make the difference between recovery and returning to opioid use.

Other methods, including counseling, peer support groups, and faith-based programs can be excellent companions to medication treatment, offering a great source of support and encouragement.

WHAT IS “PROPER USE” OF MOUD?

Proper use of MOUD means following a doctor or other expert's instructions. It is going to follow-up appointments with the doctor and maybe other treatment appointments in a program. It is staying on the medication until the doctor or other provider says the patient is ready to gradually reduce the amount and then stop. For some people, they may need to be on medication for life and that is okay. Think of people being treated with medication for diabetes or other chronic illnesses—some people may need to take this medication for a long time.

HOW LONG SHOULD MY LOVED ONE BE ON MEDICATION?

Family and friends often ask someone in treatment, “How long do you need to be on those medications?”

Everyone is different in how they respond to the medication. Length of treatment should be decided by the doctor or other provider.

Many people take at least a year on the medication; some much longer. It depends on a number of things: how long the addiction has been going on, how severe it is, and differences in each person's brain, body and personal situation.

The good news is that people can recover, rebuild their lives, care for their families, and have productive jobs while going through treatment. Medication is key to improving your loved one's chance of successful treatment.

YOUR LOVED ONE NEEDS YOUR SUPPORT

Your support will increase the chances of your family member or friend's success in treatment. What does support mean?

It means:

- Understanding and respecting the treatment process, including the importance of medications as part of that process.

- Avoiding putdowns such as “You’re just on another drug,” or “When are you getting off that stuff?”
- Celebrating and encouraging the progress and improvement that you see.
- Understanding that there is a risk of someone slipping back into use during or after treatment, and that it does not mean failure. Just as people who quit smoking often need to try several times, the same can happen with recovery from opioid use disorder.
- Lending a helping hand when you can. If the person in recovery needs help with transportation, childcare, or other such needs, see if you can help. If you can’t help or cannot help them in the way that they have asked, explain why you can’t and, if possible, help think of other solutions. You could also get in touch with treatment programs, a counselor, or social services for ideas. Become a team member in their fight against opioid use disorder.
- Seek out your own support group for family of persons with opioid use disorder. Medications for opioid use disorder are relatively new and one good resource that supports use of medications for treatment is <https://www.smartrecovery.org/family/>. Another organization to try is [Al-Anon](#), which has virtual meetings. Your loved one’s treatment provider may have other suggestions.

MORE INFORMATION

For more information, please visit the HEALing Communities Study website at www.HealTogetherOH.org.