



BupPatient Guides
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Patient Guide: TALKING TO YOUR PROVIDER

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OVERVIEW

How can you make sure you get your needs met when talking with your provider? How can you make sure you understand what your buprenorphine treatment is and get the most out of it?

- How to prepare for your first visit
- Why talking with your doctor openly and assertively will improve your treatment
- What patient-centered care involves and how you can benefit from participating.
- What information your provider will need to know to help in determining your best treatment

GET TO KNOW YOUR PROVIDER

The outcome of treatment for addiction to opioids has a great deal to do with the relationship with your provider. Successful treatment requires that you and your provider work together as a team with open and honest communication.

Forming A Relationship With Your Provider

One important purpose of the initial visit is for you and your provider to get to know each other. Your provider is there to help you, not judge you.



- Disclose any anxieties or difficulties about treatment with your provider.
- Allow the provider to respond to any concerns you have.
- Work with your provider as a partner in your treatment. Mutual respect is essential.
- Honesty is essential. Dishonesty or withholding information breaks trust and can hinder or end your treatment.
- Let your provider know your needs, concerns, and values. Tell them the most important thing you want out of treatment so that it can be included as a measure of treatment success.

OPEN COMMUNICATION WITH YOUR PROVIDER

It is important to share certain information with your provider in order to help them develop the best plan for your care.

In their guide *Talking to Your Doctor*¹, the NIH recommends the following:

- Communicate openly with your doctor to improve your treatment and avoid problems.
- Be open about topics that some people feel uncomfortable discussing, such as drug use or sexual activity. Keep in mind that providers are used to hearing about these things and realize it is important for them to know in order to provide you with the best care.
- Mention symptoms even if you think they are not important.
- Be sure to let them know about any sort of pain you are having.
- If you feel the office visit is not going the way you would like, for example, if you feel a provider is not listening, be sure to tell them.
- Help your provider understand your values. Doing this in advance is best, but be sure to speak up if they make assumptions that are not accurate.
- You can ask for instructions in writing. It may also help to bring something to your appointment for note-taking. NIH suggests writing the diagnosis or treatment in your own words.
- Don't hesitate to ask questions if you don't understand something. You can also request a healthcare provider to slow down if they are speaking too fast for you to take it in.
- Do ask questions at any point, even if you think of it later. Consider that asking your question helps the provider learn where they are not being clear.

Access Your Health Record

The NIH recommends that you learn how to access your personal medical record¹. This may involve registering for an online account. Be sure to ask your provider or their office manager how you can do this. It will allow you to review your test results, diagnoses, treatments plan and keep track of when your medication prescriptions are submitted. You can also review your record before an appointment to help you prepare any questions you may have.

Use Health Professionals For Information And Support

Be sure to obtain your provider's contact information¹ Ask them how they prefer you to communicate. Some providers prefer email or use of the electronic health record's communication system. Nurses and pharmacists also can be a good source of information on your buprenorphine treatment.

Open and honest communication about these topics is essential in receiving the best treatment possible.

COMMUNICATION STYLES

People have different communication styles, which can affect how successful they are in communicating their own concerns and understanding the communications of others. It may help you communicate better with your provider if you recognize your own communication style. This section describes the styles and how they might be improved to get the best outcome for buprenorphine treatment.

Passive Communication

Passive communication tends to avoid expressions of opinions or feelings or communicate them indirectly, for example with hints. People who communicate passively may have difficulty getting their needs met when trying to communicate. They may, for example, instead of complaining about something that was said, just hope that a provider will notice that they look hurt. To improve your communications if you tend to communicate passively, try being more direct with your provider. For example, if you notice that you are feeling hurt, angry, or confused about anything that is said or the manner in which it is said during treatment, try telling your provider and asking for what you would prefer. Your relationship with your provider is essential in determining positive treatment outcomes, and they are there to help you.

Passive Example:

Provider: Can we schedule you for induction this Thursday?

Patient: [Patient is thinking that Thursday is really not a good day.] Well, I don't know. That's really soon...but I guess that's okay.

Provider: Are you sure? We can schedule it later on. I just thought you would prefer sooner rather than later.

Patient: No, that's fine.

Patient: Okay.

The patient is being passive, not asserting herself and her desires.

Aggressive Communication

Aggressive communication involves expressing opinions or feelings in a demanding or threatening manner, using threatening body language, loudness, or other intimidation to silence other people or coerce them to communicate needs or preferences, to the point of infringing on the rights of the other participant in the conversation. This style may appear to work superficially but often results in people just wanting to do anything to appease you, which can harm your treatment. To avoid this becoming an issue during treatment, make sure that you do not try to dominate the conversation or attack your provider for treatment choices. Temper your statements so that they are not presented in a loud or demanding tone of voice. Be open to listening to what your provider is telling you about your treatment.

Aggressive Example:

Can we schedule you for induction this Thursday?

Patient: No, absolutely not! I'm getting lunch with my sister that day. I hate how all you providers think that everyone should run on your schedule!

Provider: My apologies. I just thought you would prefer sooner rather than later.

Patient: With the amount of money I'm paying, I should tell you when you're going to see me.

Provider: We'll need to call you later today to set up that appointment. Thank you for coming in.

The patient communicated aggressively with the provider. The provider felt attacked and gave up trying to help the patient choose an appointment.

Assertive Communication (This is often the most effective!)

Assertive communication is the ideal communication method. Being assertive, the person clearly states their needs, preferences, and opinions, advocating for themselves in a respectful way, without dominating the conversation or making the other person feel bad. When communicating with your provider about treatment, try to be assertive which is likely to improve your treatment outcome.

Assertive Example:

Provider: Can we schedule you for induction this Thursday?

Patient: No, that won't work. I'm getting lunch with my sister that day. Is there some other time I could come?

Provider: Okay. What days and times work best for you?

Patient: Monday morning would work.

Provider: Great. I will have the nurse schedule you for then.

Notice how in the assertive example, the patient maintained respectful communication while at the same time speaking up about preferences.

You should choose a provider with whom you feel you can communicate effectively and with whom you are not afraid to disclose information about your condition and discuss other issues concerning your treatment.

BEING FULLY ENGAGED IN YOUR TREATMENT

It is important to stay engaged in your treatment and follow essential instructions.

If you have questions about the formulation of buprenorphine medication, whether to start treatment at home or in the office, or if you should participate in individual vs. group counseling, ask your provider to explain these issues to you.

Prepare Your Questions In Advance And Consider Taking Notes

It also helps to be ready to get all your questions answered. Today's medical appointments often are short with little time with the provider. Before the appointment, type up all the questions you have with space under each to write answers. This way, you will remember everything you intended to ask your provider regarding your treatment while you are in the office and fit more questions in. Include concerns or questions that you have about the following:

- What might be expected of you throughout your treatment
- Expected effectiveness of treatment
- Side effects of treatment
- Time and costs involved
- Different treatment options
- Where to find additional information and resources regarding your treatment

When at the appointment, ask the provider to clarify anything that you do not understand and take notes about what is said in order to refer back to it later. Also, if not provided in writing, ask your provider to write down instructions so that they will be easier to remember once you leave the office.

You may also find it helpful to take a trusted family member, friend, or caregiver with you to the appointment so that they can help record any information that is gathered during the visit.

Shared Decision-Making

Health care providers are encouraged, through their professional organizations, to engage in shared decision making with their patients. This means they would involve you in deciding which care you have for your opioid use problem. In order to make good decisions, they need to provide you with the information you need to make them. If you feel you have not received enough information to decide, it is essential to ask questions. You may also ask about alternative treatments. They cannot recommend harmful treatment, but they should recommend alternatives if you are unwilling to participate in the recommended treatment.

Reading Ability And Understanding Of The English Language

You will be provided with information related to your buprenorphine treatment that may include written materials. If you have any challenges in reviewing and understanding materials you are given, it is important to communicate that to your provider. Being able to understand and remember this information is crucial.

Language: Providers are required by law to make sure you understand your medical care¹. This may involve arranging for a medical interpreter. If you need one, it would be best to arrange for it before the first appointment.

Reading Ability: Making your provider aware of your reading ability will help them communicate in a way that suits your needs. Some of the changes they might make include providing written materials in a native language, providing a recorded version, using verbal communication and pictures, or providing information to someone you choose to help you. Be sure to help your provider understand what help you need so that you understand

everything that's included in treatment and expected of you. Do not be afraid or ashamed of your reading ability, as your provider will help you to make sure you are well-informed.

PATIENT-CENTERED CARE

The type of treatment we have been describing where you are fully engaged in your own care is often called “patient-centered.” Providers play a role in this approach, too. A patient-centered approach to care includes:



- **Shared Decision-Making**
 - This involves your provider considering and respecting your values, preferences, and expressed needs including cultural values and autonomy. Your perspective is considered when evaluating care options. They may ask questions that give you a chance to talk instead of just yes/no questions. Providers engaging in patient-centered care also let you know they are listening to you.
- **Patient-Provider Trust**
 - Buprenorphine is a long-term treatment, so it is important to establish rapport and a collaborative relationship with your provider in what could be a long relationship. As part of this trusting relationship, you should have access to your health record. You should also be able to communicate privately with your provider if you wish.
- **Coordinated And Integrated Care**
 - Teams of providers involved in addiction care also need to communicate with each other so that care is coordinated and integrated. The team may include others in your provider’s office, counselors, and other clinicians who are less often involved, such as social workers or infectious disease specialists.
- **Clear Information**
 - You should receive clear information so you can make informed decisions and engage in self-care successfully. In substance use treatment, this may include receiving enough information so that you are involved in determining if medication-assisted treatment is best and which medication is most effective for your case (methadone, buprenorphine, or naltrexone). The ultimate decision of which is best is up to your provider, but you should have input.
- **Need To Understand Information**
 - You will be receiving a lot of information as you progress through treatment. Explain how you would prefer to obtain information and describe what you just heard to confirm your understanding. If necessary, ask for electronic or paper versions of protocols and policies.
- **Physical Comfort**
 - Comfort is relevant to opioid treatment because many patients who have opioid use disorder also have a chronic pain condition. Management of withdrawal symptoms, especially in early phases of treatment, is another concern in buprenorphine treatment.
- **Emotional Support**
 - Expect compassionate care, empathy, respect, and dignity without prejudice. Describe any anxiety, depression, or other concerns with your provider.
- **Involvement Of Family, Significant Others, And Care Givers**
 - In most cases, family involvement enhances addiction treatment outcomes, especially if they are aware of the treatment protocol and policies. It is important that both you and these other individuals understand what you need to do to have successful recovery from opioid use disorder.

WHAT TO BRING TO YOUR FIRST APPOINTMENT

Help your provider understand your needs. Bring to your evaluation appointment the information they need to plan the best possible treatment for you. They may also ask questions that will help them understand how much support you can get from others in your life. This information includes:

- Your medical history and medications
- Your family history and social connections
- Your substance use and treatment history

Your Medical History and Medications

Medical History And Current Health

It's important that your provider know your medical history and current health status to give you the best treatment possible.

How does this information help? Your medical history can help identify problems or potential problems that would require changes in your plan for care.

Medications

Be sure to bring a list of all your medications. Let your provider know if you are currently taking any prescription medications, supplements, or over-the-counter medications because they can affect your treatment as well. Some medications may counteract the effects of buprenorphine, so the provider needs to be aware of these potentials when embarking on your treatment plan.

Your Family History and Social Connections

Family History

Why does your provider need to know about your family medical history?

- Your family medical history may include medical problems that increase your risk for getting them.
- Your family's history of substance use problems, such as alcohol or drug addiction, affects your risk of addiction and need for support while in treatment.

Social Connections

Why does your provider need to know about your social connections? Good social support is one of the most important factors that will help you have successful treatment. If your social support system is not currently strong, your provider may recommend ways to meet this need and help you think of ways to avoid people who are likely to interfere with your treatment success.

Your Substance Use and Treatment History

Substance Use [Drugs, Alcohol, And Tobacco]

It's essential to give your provider information on all of your substance use, including alcohol, tobacco, and drugs. Drugs to include in this list are any illegal drugs and prescription drugs you use without following a prescription. Include drugs you may take now and those that you have taken in the past. Knowing about your drug use helps your provider put the supports you need into place and help warn you about potentially dangerous drug combinations.

While it may cause personal concern to reveal current illegal drug use, the provider needs to be aware of this before starting your treatment. Current use may negatively affect the outcomes of your treatment, so always be honest with your provider about this.

Substance Use Treatments

Your provider needs to know what treatments you have completed for substance use and what the outcomes were. This will help your provider to better tailor your specific buprenorphine treatment plan. For example, it will help them understand and arrange for the support system that you will need to help you succeed.

Other information to bring:

Insurance information and contact information for your pharmacy and other healthcare providers is also important.

Summary of What Information to Bring

In order to provide all the necessary information when you come in for your evaluation appointment, it may help to create a checklist. That way, nothing is overlooked:

- Medical history, your current health status, and a list of all medications you take, including over-the-counter medications and supplements
- Social and family history, including any positive supports and challenges you may face in your family or socially.
- Substances used and substance use treatments you have had. This includes any drugs, alcohol or tobacco you use now or in the past. Include both illegal drugs and prescription medications you may use with out following a provider's prescription.
- Also bring your insurance information and contact information for your pharmacy and other healthcare providers.

KEY POINTS

- Form a strong and supportive relationship with your buprenorphine provider. They will be your partner in your care for a long period of time.
- Talk to your doctor openly, clearly, and completely to get your needs met and to be fully prepared to take best care of yourself.
- When communicating about your needs and concerns in buprenorphine treatment, taking an assertive approach (rather than passive or aggressive) is often most effective.
- Patient-centered care in which you play an active role in your healthcare improves the likelihood of successful buprenorphine treatment.
- Being prepared for your first appointment by bringing certain information will help your provider determine your best treatment.

REFERENCES

1. NIH. [Talking to Your Doctor](#). *Natl Inst Health NIH*. May 8, 2015.