



**HELP
OTHERS
TAME THE
WITHDRAWAL
BEAST**

**Learn the facts about
medication-assisted treatment and
how to help people in your community
who are abusing opioids.**

Referral Information on Back Cover

A PLACE TO TURN

Local medical providers provide prescription medication to help people recover from opioid use disorder.

If your work or personal life puts you in contact with people who are misusing opioids (pain medication or street drugs), you are a valuable resource in getting them help. And now you have somewhere to refer them.

Family practice physicians and other providers in your community have recently completed special training and are now approved to offer Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT) care that combines medication to ease withdrawal symptoms and cravings along with counseling and other programs to assist the underlying addiction.

MAT allows primary care providers to prescribe buprenorphine (Suboxone) in their offices on an outpatient basis. MAT is extremely effective. Studies have found that MAT can double or even triple a person's chances of staying opioid free during the first year of treatment. MAT also leads to an 80% decrease in illegal drug use and crime.

Buprenorphine is an evidence based, thoroughly studied, effective treatment for opioid use disorder.

This brochure provides information about MAT and tips on how to talk to a person who is misusing opioids.

THE FACTS ABOUT MAT

Q: What is opioid use disorder (OUD)?

A person with opioid use disorder (OUD) is misusing legal or illegal opioids and is either addicted or at high risk of becoming addicted. Because many people with OUD use prescription drugs, they often do not think of themselves as having an addiction.

Q: What happens when someone tries to stop using opioids?

Quitting opioids — whether it is prescription pain pills or street drugs such as heroin — is not a matter of willpower. Withdrawal causes a person with OUD to become very sick while at the same time short-circuiting the brain's executive functioning. The person is incapable of using logic or reasoning to overcome their cravings for the drug.

Q: How does MAT help break addiction?

The medication prescribed by primary care providers outside of clinics is buprenorphine, or a combination of buprenorphine and naloxone (Suboxone). This medication reduces withdrawal symptoms, decreases cravings, and helps reset the brain's chemistry. This can help the person remain abstinent while other treatments such as therapy are used to address the underlying disease, promote a positive self-image, and build healthy coping skills.

Q: How does buprenorphine work in the brain?

Buprenorphine is a chemical that attaches to the opioid receptors in the brain, but it only partially activates those receptors. By doing this, the medication fulfills the brain's craving for opioids but doesn't give the patient the same euphoria as opioids. In other words, it doesn't make a person high, but it does keep them from going into withdrawal.

Q: Isn't MAT just substituting one drug with another?

No. Buprenorphine doesn't make a person high. When used as directed, addiction medications do not trigger euphoria or have dangerous adverse effects. In fact, MAT is designed to make it possible for patients to be productive, to become healthier, to secure employment,

or to return to work or school. People taking medications to treat their substance use disorders can work, drive, and care for their families.

Q: Does a patient go to rehab to get MAT?

No. Buprenorphine can be prescribed by specially licensed medical providers in their practices on an outpatient basis. During certain times, providers can even prescribe it via telehealth visits.

Q: Is MAT used alone?

No. MAT is like a life buoy. It saves the person from drowning but does not get them out of the storm. Buprenorphine helps break the physical effects of withdrawal, which gives the person the chance to reset their brain and address the issues that caused them to misuse opioids. Medication alone is not enough to help a person with a substance use disorder achieve and maintain abstinence in the long term. Effective treatment addresses the whole person and combines the use of MAT with:

- Evidence-based behavioral therapies, such as cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), dialectical behavior therapy (DBT), and counseling
- Education and coping skills
- Relapse prevention programs
- Psychosocial support such as peer recovery specialists and sober activities
- Other pain relief treatments (in the case of opioids being used for chronic pain)

Q: Does MAT work for methamphetamine addiction?

No. However, people often use methamphetamine in combination with heroin or other opioids, so it can be beneficial to refer them to a MAT provider. A different type of MAT is also available for people who are abusing alcohol.


Q: Does MAT require health insurance?

It depends on the provider. Some providers require private insurance, Medicaid or Medicare. Others will work with self-pay patients.

HOW TO TALK WITH SOMEONE ABOUT MAT

If you know of someone with an opioid use disorder and want to refer them for MAT, please use the information provided in this brochure to answer their questions and use the referral information on the back to help them find a local provider who can prescribe MAT. If you're not sure how to start the conversation, here are some tips:

- 1 Approach the person in private and make sure they are aware that you are talking to them confidentially.
- 2 Don't be afraid to ask them if they are using pain pills or street opioids and if they want to stop. Chances are good that they want to stop, but they are afraid, or they have tried before but failed.
- 3 Address the issue directly. Here are some questions to use:
 - Are you using prescription pain killers, pain medication or a non-prescribed drug such as Oxycontin or heroin?
 - If the person is misusing pain medication, ask: Are the pills still relieving your pain? Are you having to take more than you used to, or running out before it is time for a refill? Do the pills make you tired?
 - Did you know that opioids prevent your brain from figuring out ways to stop?
 - Did you know that it is difficult for ANYONE — not just you—to stop using opioids?
 - Do you know that there are medications that will help take away cravings and withdrawal symptoms?
 - Did you know you can get these medications as an outpatient and continue to work, go to school, and live at home?
 - Are you interested in a confidential referral to one of these doctors?



More than 1,000 medical providers across Colorado have been approved to provide outpatient Medication-Assisted Treatment to people with opioid use disorder. The medication is prescribed and provided in their offices as part of comprehensive primary care services. Patients take them on an outpatient basis, while participating in behavioral health programs including therapy, education, and relapse prevention. More providers are being trained and approved monthly.

MAKE A REFERRAL

To see an up-to-date list of MAT providers available in your area, please go to
mathelps.org.

