

Low Dose Buprenorphine Protocols for Patients Using Fentanyl

For convenience, “buprenorphine” is used to refer to buprenorphine/naloxone combination medication.

There are several low dose protocols. All are based on the idea that gradual displacement of long-acting opioids with buprenorphine allows patients to transition without severe, prolonged withdrawal. These protocols require the patient or the pharmacist to cut the 2 mg film into the appropriate number of pieces.

Sample Protocols

Day 1 – 0.5 mg once

Day 2 – 0.5 mg twice

Day 3 – 1 mg twice

Day 4 – 2 mg twice

Day 5 – 3 mg twice

Day 6 – 4 mg twice

Day 7 – 12 mg, stop all other opioids; take additional 2 – 4 mg buprenorphine every 2-4 hours, if needed, to a dose not to exceed 24 mg. (In virtually all patients, higher doses are without effect).

Day 8 on – Continue buprenorphine at a dose not to exceed 24 mg. If dosing appears incompletely effective, try dividing the dose to 12 mg twice a day or 8 mg three times per day.

Day 1 – 0.5 mg once

Day 2 – 0.5 mg twice

Day 3 – 1 mg twice

Day 4 – 2 mg twice

Day 5 – 4 mg twice

Day 6 – 8 mg twice

Day 7 on – 8 mg two or three times per day, stop all other opioids.

NOTE:

15-20% of individuals with opioid use disorder carry genetic variants that prevent buprenorphine from fully suppressing cravings/withdrawal symptoms. If Cravings and withdrawals are not fully suppressed after one to two weeks of continuous treatment, the patient should be referred to an Opioid Treatment Program for methadone, which works for everybody.

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