



# Helping Dental Professionals Identify and Support Patients with Substance Use Disorders

Oral health is an essential part of overall health. Healthcare professionals who provide care to patients with possible Opioid Use Disorder (OUD) or Substance Use Disorders (SUD) need to be aware of the special considerations this population may experience. Use this resource to learn how dental professionals can identify patients who may be at high-risk for OUD and SUD, while seeking care in the dental setting.

## Objectives For This Discussion

- Identify patients who may be high risk for Opioid Use Disorders (OUD) or Substance Use Disorder (SUD), prescription misuse, and drug interactions.
- Recognize that patients with OUD/SUD may have additional oral health care and pain management needs.
- Identify potential oral complications with patients prescribed buprenorphine/naloxone products for OUD/SUD.

## Considerations for Intake Assessment

To assist dental professionals in identifying and supporting patients with substance use disorders, below are considerations for an intake assessment.

- Provide rationale for questions.
- Assess pain and prior pain management approaches.
- Assess current substance use, legal and illicit.
- Assess medical, psychiatric, and psychosocial risk factors.
- Current medications.
- Open-ended inquiry about non-medical opioid use.
- PDMP (Prescription Drug Monitoring Programs).
- Release of Information for other providers.

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## ANXIETY MANAGEMENT/PRE-MEDICATION

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- Discuss in advance of appointment: establishing trust can be a simple dental anxiety reliever
- Steps should be taken to manage anxiety without increasing the risk for SUDs
- Nitrous Oxide
- Valium/Halcion
- Music/ video glasses/noise cancellation

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The [Food and Drug Administration \(FDA\)](#) warns about dental problems with buprenorphine medicines dissolved in the mouth to treat opioid use disorder and pain. Benefits for use outweigh these risks and professional oral care can help. The dental problems include tooth decay, cavities, oral infections, and tooth loss, can be serious and have been reported even in patients with no history of dental issues. Despite these risks, buprenorphine is an important treatment option for opioid use disorder (OUD) and pain, and the benefits of these medicines outweigh the risks.

The comprehensive approach of buprenorphine combined with counseling and other behavioral therapies is often one of the most effective ways to treat OUD. This approach, called medication-assisted treatment (MAT), is tailored to meet each patient's needs and can help sustain recovery and prevent or reduce opioid overdose.

## Buprenorphine-Suboxone-Methadone: “The Perfect Storm” for Dental Disease

1. Acidity –3.4% Strips or Tabs are placed sublingual or inside the cheek
  - Strips/Tabs are sticky and leave a film
2. Dryness--Possible xerostomia from Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT)
  - Increased bacteria in a dry, low pH environment = increased caries risk
3. Poor Oral Hygiene Habits
  - Population tends to smoke or vape more
  - Drinking sugary beverages
  - Compromised self-care
  - Limited access to affordable dental care

## Prevention of Oral Disease

- Prescribers of MAT should recommend visiting a dentist at time of Rx
- Instruct Patients to:
  - Rinse 30 min after use of strip/tab and swallow
  - Wait one hour then brush teeth
  - Good oral hygiene instructions
  - Drink more water to overcome xerostomia
  - Limit sugary beverages and decrease smoking/vaping
- If they have dental pain, do not discontinue use of MAT. See a dentist immediately.
- Consider prescription fluoride toothpaste or fluoride trays

## MAT/Dental Care Coordination



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- Clarify dental issue and procedure in advance
- Estimate pain requirement for non-MAT patients
- Consider MAT impact on dental pain management
  - Antagonist effect of naltrexone
  - Increased tolerance with buprenorphine/methadone
  - Buprenorphine receptor binding
- Examine OUD clinical stability and relapse risk
- Consider opioid vs. non-opioid approaches
- Determine follow-up plan: pain management, medical prescription (RX) disposal, monitoring, Narcan

## What Should Health Professionals do?

Physicians should ask patients about their oral health history prior to prescribing treatment with a transmucosal buprenorphine. Serious dental problems have been reported in patients with no history of dental issues, so it is important to refer them to a dentist as soon as possible after starting transmucosal buprenorphine.

Dentists treating someone taking a transmucosal buprenorphine product should perform a baseline dental evaluation and caries risk assessment, establish a dental caries preventive plan, and encourage regular dental checkups.

Dental professionals can play an important role in screening patients and team members for substance use and misuse and substance use disorders. The National Institute on Drug Abuse has resources for [Screening for Substance Use in the Dental Setting](#).

## Patient Information

Patients using buprenorphine medicines dissolved in the mouth should take extra steps to help lessen the risk of serious dental problems. After the medicine is completely dissolved, take a large sip of water, swish it gently around your teeth and gums, and swallow. You should wait at least 1 hour before brushing your teeth to avoid damage to your teeth and give your mouth a chance to return to its natural state.

Inform your health care professional if you have a history of tooth problems, including cavities. Schedule a dentist visit soon after starting this medicine and inform your dentist that you are taking buprenorphine, and schedule regular dental checkups while taking this medicine.

[Find-a-Dentist](#)



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Your dentist can customize a tooth decay prevention plan for you. Notify both your health care professional and your dentist immediately if you experience any problems with your teeth or gums. Health care professionals should be aware the benefits of buprenorphine clearly outweigh the risks and are an important tool to treat OUD. When combined with counseling and other behavioral therapies, this comprehensive MAT approach is often the most effective way for treating OUD and can help sustain recovery and prevent or reduce opioid overdose. ADA Resources for Healthcare professionals

Please consider providing your patients with the following Opioid and Preventing Prescription Drug Misuse Resource sheet and print out with your after-visit instructions for the patients.

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Providers  
Clinical Support  
System



Opioid  
Response  
Network