Did You Know?

PharMerica®

Buprenorphine Formulations: OUD vs. Pain Products

Introduction

Buprenorphine is a **partial mu-opioid receptor agonist** used to treat **opioid use disorder (OUD)** and **pain**. Products differ in their indications, formulations, dosing, administration, and monitoring requirements. Because buprenorphine products are not interchangeable, understanding these differences is important for safe and appropriate use.

Buprenorphine for OUD

Following passage of the MAT Act, healthcare providers with a standard DEA registration may prescribe buprenorphine for OUD; **an X-waiver is no longer required.** Buprenorphine products FDA-labeled for OUD are generally **dosed in milligrams (mg)** and reduce withdrawal symptoms, cravings, and illicit opioid use. Because of its high receptor affinity, buprenorphine may cause **precipitated withdrawal** if initiated incorrectly after full opioid agonist use.

Although buprenorphine has a lower overdose risk than full opioid agonists, misuse and diversion remain possible. Some formulations **contain naloxone to reduce misuse potential.** Extended-release injectable buprenorphine products, such as Sublocade® and Brixadi®, must be administered by a healthcare provider and are available only through restricted distribution programs. Pharmacies must be certified through the applicable manufacturer **Risk Evaluation and Mitigation Strategy (REMS) program** before purchasing or dispensing these products. Dispensing requirements may vary by product, state regulations, and pharmacy policies.

Buprenorphine for Pain

Buprenorphine products FDA-labeled for pain include buccal, transdermal, and injectable formulations. These products are generally **dosed in micrograms (mcg)** and do not provide adequate exposure for the treatment of OUD. Careful initiation is also required when transitioning from a full opioid agonist to buprenorphine for pain.

When Pain and OUD Coexist

Chronic pain and OUD frequently coexist, requiring assessment and management of both conditions. For a resident receiving transmucosal buprenorphine for OUD, divided dosing may improve analgesia while maintaining OUD treatment. Analgesic effects last approximately 8 hours, whereas suppression of withdrawal and cravings lasts 24 to 36 hours. Assess pain and OUD treatment goals separately and adjust therapy accordingly.

Considerations in Older Adults

Residents receiving chronic opioid therapy may develop withdrawal if opioids are stopped abruptly or buprenorphine is initiated incorrectly. Older adults may present with atypical symptoms of opioid withdrawal, including confusion, functional decline, falls, or behavioral changes. During initiation and dose titration, monitor pain control, withdrawal symptoms, sedation, dizziness, orthostatic hypotension, respiratory status, and fall risk.

This resource is abridged and for informational purposes only. Last reviewed October 2026.

Did You Know?

PharMerica®

Buprenorphine Formulations: OUD vs. Pain Products

The following table summarizes currently available buprenorphine formulations and key clinical considerations.

Buprenorphine Formulation Comparison

Product	Formulation	Typical Dosing	Clinical Considerations
FDA-LABELED FOR OPIOID USE DISORDER			
Buprenorphine (generic, Subutex®)	Sublingual tablet	Daily	• Allow to dissolve completely • Do not crush, chew or swallow • Dental adverse effects reported
Buprenorphine/Naloxone (generic, Suboxone®)	Sublingual films/tablets	Daily	• Contains naloxone to deter misuse • Allow to dissolve completely • Dental adverse effects reported
Buprenorphine/Naloxone (Zubsolv®)	Sublingual tablet	Daily	• Contains naloxone to deter misuse • Higher bioavailability; not directly interchangeable with Suboxone® • Dental adverse effects reported
Buprenorphine Extended-Release (Sublocade®)	SC injection	Monthly	• REMS-restricted product • HCP administration required • Establish transmucosal buprenorphine tolerability prior to initiation
Buprenorphine Extended-Release (Brixadi®)	SC injection	Weekly or Monthly	• REMS-restricted product • HCP administration required • Weekly and monthly doses are not interchangeable
FDA-LABELED FOR PAIN			
Buprenorphine (Belbuca®)	Buccal film	Every 12 hours	• Not for PRN use or acute pain • Allow to dissolve completely • Dental adverse effects reported
Buprenorphine Extended-Release (generic, Butrans®)	Transdermal patch	Weekly	• Not for PRN use or acute pain • Rotate application sites • Avoid external heat sources
Buprenorphine (generic, Buprenex®)	IM or slow IV injection	Up to every 6 hours, as needed	• Short-acting opioid analgesic • For acute pain • HCP administration required

Abbreviations: SC = Subcutaneous; **REMS** = Risk Evaluation and Mitigation Strategy; **HCP** = Healthcare Provider; **PRN** = As needed; **IV** = Intravenous; **IM** = Intramuscular

This resource is abridged and for informational purposes only. Last reviewed October 2026.

Did You Know?

PharMerica®

Buprenorphine Formulations: OUD vs. Pain Products

Key Takeaways

- **Verify the indication.** Buprenorphine products for OUD and pain are not interchangeable.
- **Recognize formulation differences.** Dosing and administration vary by product.
- **Initiate carefully.** Monitor for withdrawal, efficacy, and adverse effects during titration.

References

1. Poliwoda S, Noor N, Jenkins JS, et al. Buprenorphine and its formulations: a comprehensive review. Health Psychol Res. 2022;10(3):37517. doi:10.52965/001c.37517.
2. NEJM Group. (2026, March) Buprenorphine for Pain Management & Treatment of Opioid Use Disorder. https://pain-management-cme.nejm.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/buprenorphine_for_pain_and_oud.pdf.
3. Buprenorphine sublingual tablet [package insert]. Cranbury, NJ: Sun Pharmaceutical Industries, 2026.
4. Buprenorphine and naloxone sublingual tablet [package insert]. Greenville, SC: PAI Pharma, 2026.
5. Belbuca [package insert]. Raleigh, NC: Biodelivery Sciences, 2026.
6. Buprenorphine hydrochloride injection [package insert]. Berkeley Heights, NJ: Hikma, 2025.
7. Sublocade [package insert]. North Chesterfield, VA: Indivior Inc., 2026.
8. Brixadi [package insert]. Plymouth Meeting, PA: Braeburn Inc., 2025.
9. Butrans [package insert]. Stamford, CT: Knoa Pharma LLC, 2026.
10. Zubsolv [package insert]. Parsippany, NJ: Dexcel Pharma USA, 2026.
11. Suboxone [package insert]. North Chesterfield, VA: Indivior Inc., 2025.

This resource is abridged and for informational purposes only. Last reviewed October 2026.