

## What is Sublocade?

**Sublocade is a medication used to treat opioid use disorder by helping to manage cravings for opioids and stopping symptoms of withdrawal. It is the long-acting version of buprenorphine, one of the ingredients in Suboxone.**

This medication is similar to Suboxone but is longer acting so you will only need to receive this medication once a month compared to daily. A healthcare provider injects Sublocade just under the skin (subcutaneously) into your abdomen once a month.

This means you no longer need to visit the pharmacy daily or weekly and allows for more flexibility with travel. It also offers protective effects for individuals who may occasionally use fentanyl-contaminated products or continue opioid use, as it reduces the risk of overdose.

## Missed doses

It is important to take your Sublocade as prescribed. This is monthly, with a minimum of 26 days between injections. When you miss a dose, you may experience increased cravings and decreased tolerance. If you miss a dose, please see your healthcare provider as soon as possible to reschedule your injection. If you miss your dose by more than two weeks, you may have to re-start with Suboxone again before resuming injections.

## Starting your journey

Before you can be prescribed Sublocade you will need to be started on Suboxone tablets to help control withdrawal symptoms and help you transition to Sublocade. Talk to your healthcare provider about the transition from Suboxone to Sublocade.

Before you are prescribed Suboxone, you will be asked about the substances you use and your health. You may also be asked to do blood work, a urine test, and possibly other tests as part of your wellness plan.

In the past, starting a Suboxone prescription meant that you had to be in withdrawal before taking your first dose. Today there are new options available that do not require this. Talk to your healthcare provider to learn more about your options.

## Taking Sublocade

A healthcare professional will administer Sublocade once a month (at least 26 days between doses). This injection is given just under the skin (subcutaneously) in your abdomen. If this is your first time receiving a Sublocade injection, it may be painful and you may be uncomfortable: this is normal and many clients experience that feeling. Your healthcare provider can provide options to help with managing uncomfortable sensations. You can request ice or other measures to help with this discomfort. After it is injected as a liquid, Sublocade turns into a solid called a "depot" that gradually releases medication throughout the month. The depot may be seen or felt as a small lump under the skin at the injection site on your abdomen. Over the next 26 days, as the medication is absorbed into your body the bump will get smaller.

It is important that you do not try to remove, rub, or massage the bump at the injection site.

Sublocade comes in two doses: 300mg and 100mg. When you first start treatment, your healthcare provider will start with 300mg to help the medication reach an effective level in your body. After 2-3 injections, the provider may lower the dose to 100mg- this is normally called a "maintenance dose", however, your healthcare provider will work with you to decide what dose is best.



## Urine drug test

Urine drug tests are only used by your care provider to develop your treatment plan and are completely confidential. All tests are used for planning and supporting your care and goals.

Your medication will not be refused if other substances are found in your urine.

## Side effects

Everyone's journey with Sublocade will look different. As with most medications, you may experience some side effects. Sublocade often has less side effects than other opioid medications.

### Side effects may include:

- Constipation or upset stomach
- Headache
- Injection site itching, bruising and / or pain
  - Do not press on or rub bump at injection site. Do not scratch area.
  - Try using an ice pack to help with pain and itching.

It is important to report any side effects to your health care provider or pharmacist so they can support you to reduce them.

### Rare but Serious Side Effects:

- **Liver or Other Organ Issues**  
Your doctor may request blood tests to assess the function of your liver and other organs both before and after you begin taking this medication.
- **Serotonin Syndrome**  
This can occur when there is an excess of a brain chemical called serotonin in your body.  
  
Early signs may include confusion, agitation, muscle twitching, sweating, shivering, or diarrhea. Severe symptoms can involve a high fever, seizures, irregular heartbeats, or fainting.

If you notice any early symptoms, **seek emergency care** right away. For serious symptoms, **call 911** immediately.

## Managing side effects

### Water

Drinking plenty of water can help with a number of side effects including excessive sweating, nausea, vomiting and bowel issues.

### Sleep

Sleep is an important part of your wellness journey and if you are having difficulty sleeping it is important to let your health care provider know. Some ways to help improve your sleep include getting regular exercise, eating a small snack before bed, and developing a bedtime routine.

### Over-the-counter medications

Some common medications can help with symptoms, such as Ibuprofen for pain, or Gravol for nausea. Let your health care provider know about any over-the-counter medications you are taking, and ask about ways these might help manage side effects.

### Connection

Connection to culture and community can help support your health and wellness. This will look different for everyone but may include connecting with Elders or Traditional Knowledge Keepers in your community, taking part in land-based healing programs, or finding an activity that you enjoy.

Starting a new routine around taking Sublocade can cause a wide range of feelings and managing unwanted side effects may be stressful. .

It may be helpful to take five minute breaks throughout the day. Some activities that you can practice in these breaks include:

- Stretching
- Deep breathing
- Meditation
- Drawing
- Listening to music
- Going for a walk
- Doing an activity you enjoy
- Speak to someone you trust



# Wellness

Wellness is a balance of many factors, and as you begin your journey with Sublocade it can be helpful to take some time to consider the ways that you can take care of your mental, emotional, physical and spiritual wellness. Continue to talk to your care provider about your goals for being on Sublocade and how this relates to your overall wellness.

## Mental

## Emotional

## Physical

## Spiritual

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# Staying safe

While taking Sublocade it is important to let your health care provider know of any other medications or substances you may be taking. Some substances, such as alcohol or benzodiazepines, may increase your risk of both complications and / or overdose.

Always take your medication as prescribed to minimize risk of overdose. If your health status changes, please talk to your prescriber.

Please don't stop your OAT without support from your prescriber as it can cause withdrawals and increase risk of overdose if you use opioids.

If you are using other substances while prescribed Sublocade we recommend following harm reduction strategies:

- Don't use alone. Use with a buddy.
- Go to an overdose prevention site or use the Lifeguard app.
- Get your drugs checked if possible.
- Use a test dose: start low and go slow.
- Have a Naloxone kit and know how to use it.
- Access new drug use equipment and don't share supplies.
- Use caution when mixing substances.

