



Answers to Common Questions About Accessing Opioid Use Disorder Treatment

LENGTH
OF TIME



COST



PAIN
MANAGEMENT



QUESTIONS
TO ASK



Partnering for Better Chronic Pain Management and Safer Opioid Use: A Knowledge Hub for People With Disability and Their Providers

■ How long does addiction treatment take¹?

People are advised to take medication to treat opioid use disorder long enough for the brain to heal. A person on medication to treat opioid use disorder often takes the medication for over 12 months.

It is important to continue counseling until new behaviors become a habit. The amount of time spent in counseling differs for each person.

Remaining in treatment is key to success.

- The most common reason treatment fails is that people drop out before they are ready.
- People with mental health conditions and personal trauma may need more time to heal.

Learn more about why staying in treatment long enough is important for recovery. See these resources in [Drugs, Brains, and Behavior: The Science of Addiction](#) (National Institute on Drug Abuse):

- [Drugs and the Brain](#) — Information about how drugs affect the brain
- [Addiction Treatment and Recovery](#) — Information about addiction treatment

■ Does my health insurance cover treatment for opioid use disorder?

The law requires health insurers to cover treatment for addiction, just as they cover treatment for physical health conditions. How much you will pay out of pocket for addiction treatment depends on the health insurance plan you have. For information about how your health insurance plan covers addiction treatment, call the member services department on your health insurance card.

- These resources explain more about addiction treatment coverage:
 - [Rehab and Insurance: What Are Your Options?](#) — Information on insurance options to cover the costs of addiction treatment
 - [Does Insurance Cover Treatment for Opioid Addiction?](#) — Information about the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act of 2008, which requires equal coverage of physical and mental health conditions
 - [MLN Matters®: Medicare Coverage of Substance Abuse Services](#) — Bulletin from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services on Medicare coverage of addiction treatment services

1. The terms *opioid use disorder treatment* and *addiction treatment* have the same meaning.

■ What if I don't have health insurance?

If you don't have health insurance and you need addiction treatment, your state may pay for treatment services. These services often require proof of low income. Contact your state or local mental health or substance use agency for information.

- If you need help paying for treatment services, go to [Help.org](#).
- You may be able to sign up for a health plan through the Affordable Care Act insurance marketplace. Learn more at [HealthCare.gov](#).
- To find out if you qualify for Medicaid, go to <https://www.healthcare.gov/blog/who-qualifies-for-medicaid/>.
- For information on how people can get financial assistance to cover the costs of addiction treatment, go to [Scholarships for Drug and Alcohol Rehab](#).

■ How will addiction treatment affect my pain?

The amount of pain you experience as you reduce or stop opioids depends on two things: the type of medication used to treat opioid use disorder and the dose of opioids you were taking.

- People who take buprenorphine (byoo-puh-NOR-feen) or methadone (MEH-thuh-doan) to treat opioid use disorder find that these drugs may also help reduce pain.
- High doses of opioids can increase your pain. Increased pain when taking opioids is called *opioid-induced hyperalgesia*. This means the opioids have made the body very sensitive to pain. The good news is that the pain will decrease as opioids are tapered, or slowly reduced.
 - For more information about opioid-induced hyperalgesia, go to this Harvard Health blog: [More opioids more pain: Fueling the fire](#).

Before you start addiction treatment, talk to your provider about how they will help you manage your pain during your addiction treatment. Ask your provider these questions:

- Can they refer you to other approaches for managing chronic pain? These might include mindfulness, gentle exercise, and cognitive behavioral therapy. For more information, see the *Knowledge Hub* resource [Methods for Managing Chronic Pain Other Than Medication](#).
- Do they prescribe buprenorphine? This medication for treating opioid addiction may also help reduce pain. For more information, see the *Knowledge Hub* resource [How Opioid Use Disorder Is Treated](#).

Develop a plan for how you will manage your pain as your provider tapers your dose and you stop taking opioids.

- One strategy is distraction. This means shifting your attention away from pain by focusing on something else. For example, you might do deep breathing exercises, listen to music, read a book, or watch a movie. Plan activities you enjoy.
- Try meditation, massage, heat and cold treatments, and non-opioid medications.

For more information about self-managing pain, go to these *Knowledge Hub* resources:

- [Moving From the Cycle of Pain to a Cycle of Wellness](#)
- [Developing a Plan for Self-Management of Pain](#)
- [Methods for Managing Chronic Pain Other Than Medication](#)

■ If I go to an addiction treatment program, what should I do to make sure it is accessible to me?

Before you start addiction treatment, you can share information about your needs and ask questions to make sure the program is prepared to meet your needs. Addiction treatment programs often have intake coordinators who assess clients' needs.

Share information about yourself.

Call before your first visit and let office staff know if you:

- Use a manual or power wheelchair
- Use communication aides or other assistive resources
- Will bring a service or guide dog
- Will have a support person with you



TIP | Be sure to write down the name of the person you talked with.

Let providers know about any accommodations you need to fully take part in treatment. These include:

- Frequent, short stretch breaks during counseling or group sessions
- Handouts in large print, or information in audio or video form instead of print
- Asking people to speak louder in group sessions

Ask questions to make sure the program can meet your needs.

Getting into and moving around inside the building. Questions about accessibility include:

- Is the building close to public transportation drop-off or the parking lot?
- Is there an automatic door?
- Are there stairs? If yes, are there ramps and elevators?
- Are the restrooms accessible?

Assessing and planning for your needs:

- Does the program assess for disability needs during the intake process?
- Have they treated people with a similar disability? If yes, what did the program staff do to make sure the people could fully take part in the program?
- Will program staff write your accommodation needs in the treatment plan? Will they update your plan as your needs change?
- Will someone be assigned to find solutions if you struggle to fully participate?
- Do they foresee any reasons that you may not be able to fully participate?

Making and maintaining progress:

- Did people with similar needs go through the program and finish it?
- What will happen if you can't fully meet program expectations? For example, what if you progress more slowly than usual, struggle to get ready for an activity on time, or can't sit in a group session the whole time?
- What is the plan for support after the treatment program ends? Do outpatient or community services include people with similar accommodation needs?

For more information about finding an accessible treatment program, see the *Knowledge Hub* resource [Accommodations to Look For in Substance Use Treatment Programs](#).

■ What if there is no substance use treatment program nearby?

Look for a primary care provider in your area who is trained to prescribe buprenorphine (byoo-puh-NOR-feen) or extended-release (XR) naltrexone (nal-TREK-sown). These medications are used to treat opioid use disorder.

- To find a nearby provider who is trained to prescribe these medications, go to the [Buprenorphine Practitioner Locator](#).
- Call your county public health department for help. Local health departments often have resources to help people find substance use treatment.
 - To find the health department in your area, go to this [Directory of Local Health Departments](#).

If you are having trouble finding an addiction counselor where you live, consider virtual counseling that uses online communication tools. You will need a phone, computer, or other personal device with a camera.

- If you don't have a camera with a phone or computer, ask a trusted source such as a friend or family member if they can share their device with you.
- Call your health insurance company to find out if they cover virtual visits for addiction treatment. If they do, ask for a list of addiction treatment providers who offer virtual visits.

If you plan to take methadone to treat opioid use disorder, you will need to go to an opioid treatment program each day to get methadone. If daily visits will be hard because of your disability, the treatment program can ask the state to approve take-home medicine. To do this, the program must submit an exception request.

- You can share information from the [SAMHSA web page](#) on how to submit an exception request with your treatment program.



For more information visit: Partnering for Better Chronic Pain Management and Safer Opioid Use: A Knowledge Hub for People With Disability and Their Providers | [KnowledgeHub.air.org](https://www.knowledgehub.air.org)

Partnering for Better Chronic Pain Management and Safer Opioid Use: A Knowledge Hub for People With Disability and Their Providers was developed by the American Institutes for Research (AIR) under a grant from the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR), grant number 90DPGE0006. NIDILRR is a Center within the Administration for Community Living (ACL), Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The contents of this brief do not necessarily represent the policy of NIDILRR, ACL, and HHS, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.

About the American Institutes for Research

Established in 1946, the American Institutes for Research® (AIR®) is a nonpartisan, not-for-profit organization that conducts behavioral and social science research and delivers technical assistance both domestically and internationally in the areas of education, health, and the workforce. AIR's work is driven by its mission to generate and use rigorous evidence that contributes to a better, more equitable world. With headquarters in Arlington, Virginia, AIR has offices across the U.S. and abroad. For more information, visit www.air.org.



1400 Crystal Drive, 10th Floor | Arlington, VA 22202-3239 | 202.403.5000
www.air.org