

# Understanding Medication Assisted Treatment: Why Experts Say It Is Effective for Substance Use Disorder.



There are many myths associated with medication assisted treatment (MAT). Some argue that MAT substitutes one addiction for another. Others believe that it is not evidence based and it increases the risk for overdose in patients.

Let's explore some common questions people have and why some agencies list MAT as first line treatment.

## **What is MAT?**

According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, MAT is the use of FDA approved drugs to treat substance use disorders such as opioids, smoking or alcohol use. In opioid treatment programs, there are three types of commonly used medications:

- **Methadone** is a clinic-based opioid agonist that does not block other narcotics while preventing withdrawal when taking it. It is dispensed daily in specialty regulated clinics. Methadone "tricks" the brain into thinking it's still getting the abused drug; the person does not get high from it and they feel normal, so withdrawal does not occur. It is the only drug approved for women who are pregnant or breast feeding in an opioid treatment program.
- **Buprenorphine** is an opioid agonist/antagonist that blocks other narcotics while reducing withdrawal risk. It can be administered as a daily dissolving tablet, cheek film or 6-month implant under the skin. It reduces and suppresses cravings for the abused drug. It is prescribed by a physician during an office visit.
- **Naltrexone** is a non-addictive opioid antagonist that blocks the effects of other narcotics and is taken as a daily pill or monthly injection. Naltrexone blocks the euphoric and sedative effects of the abused drug and prevents feeling of euphoria if a person relapses. It is prescribed by a physician during an office visit.

These medications are used to treat opioid dependence for substances such as heroin, morphine and codeine, as well as semi-synthetic opioids such as oxycodone and hydrocodone. People may safely take medications used in MAT for months, years or a lifetime.

## **By using MAT are you substituting one addictive drug for another?**

No. When using medication assisted treatment according to doctor's instructions, the medication will not create or maintain addiction. MAT helps to reduce cravings and withdrawal, which allows a person to focus on

maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Research indicates that a combination of medication and behavioral therapies can prove to be effective in treating substance use disorder and help sustain recovery. In fact, according to the National Council for Behavioral Health, patients on MAT for at least 1-2 years have the greatest rates of long-term success. MAT utilizes a multitude of different medication options that can be tailored to fit the unique needs of a patient.

***Are there any other options for the treatment of Opioid Use?***

Yes. There are treatment programs such as outpatient, inpatient and residential programs. Outpatient programs can range in hours of treatments while the patient continues to live at home with programs available during weekends and evenings. Inpatient treatment provides specialty units at hospitals or medical clinics which offer detox and rehabilitation services. Residential programs provide treatment in a residential setting and can last for a month up to a year, depending on the individual's needs. 12-Step/mutual support programs, such as Narcotics Anonymous (NA), are also available for support for those with substance use disorders.

***Is MAT covered by most insurance plans?***

The Affordable Care Act now requires most insurers to cover substance use treatment benefits. In addition, The Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act (MHPAEA) of 2008 requires health insurers and group health plans to provide the same level of benefits for behavioral health services that they do for primary care. As of May 2013, 31 state Medicaid FFS programs covered methadone maintenance treatment provided in outpatient programs. State Medicaid agencies vary as to whether buprenorphine is listed on the Preferred Drug List, and whether prior authorization is required.

If you have any questions regarding insurance coverage when seeking substance abuse treatment, call us. Our insurance specialist can answer questions about private insurance, Medicaid and Medicare coverage. Call 855-652-3737 for immediate guidance and support.

Source: 1) <https://www.samhsa.gov/medication-assistedtreatment>  
2) <https://www.thenationalcouncil.org/mat/>