

Information for adult patients and carers

**Buprenorphine (Opioid)
5 microgram/hour to 20
microgram/hour
Patches**

A decorative graphic at the bottom of the page consisting of three overlapping, wavy bands of blue color, transitioning from a lighter blue at the top to a darker blue at the bottom.

What are Buprenorphine patches?

Buprenorphine (BUE-pre-NOR-feen) is an opioid medication which is available as a topical application in the form of patches for adult use. They stick onto the surface of the skin. Patches may be prescribed in 5 microgram/hour and up to 20 microgram/hour strengths and are used for adults with moderate, persistent/chronic ('long-standing') pain. Your pain management specialist/GP will discuss any contraindications as to whether you can be prescribed Buprenorphine patches.

How to use Buprenorphine patches safely

You do not need to apply the patch directly onto the area where the pain is.

Make sure you DO NOT cut the patches.

For the Buprenorphine patch to work effectively, the best areas to apply the patch are:

- Upper part of your back
- Upper outer arm (make sure it is above the elbow)
- On your chest or the side of your chest

Where not to apply the patch to:

- Areas with large scars
- Irritated or delicate skin
- Areas that are not flat e.g. your joints.

How do I apply my first Buprenorphine patch?

Before using your Buprenorphine patches, please read the instructions that come with your patch carefully

The area of the skin you apply the patch to must:

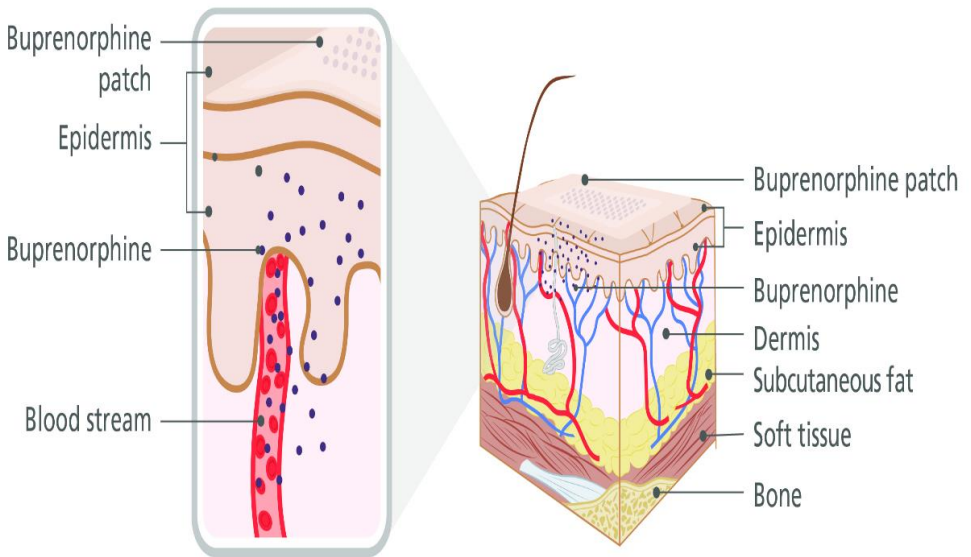
- Be dry
- Be clean
- Be free of excessive hair, if you need to remove any hair from where the patch is going to be placed, it is best to trim/cut the hair instead of shaving, as shaving may irritate the skin
- Make sure the patch is on the upper part of your body
- Make sure that after cleaning the area where the patch is going to be placed, that you **DO NOT** apply any soap, oil, cream or lotions, as this may stop the patch from sticking to your skin
- Press the patch against your skin for at least 30 seconds. Make sure it sticks well, especially the edges
- If your doctor tells you to use more than 1 patch, follow the instructions that come with the patches. Do not let the patches overlap on your skin
- Do not cover the patch or patches with anything e.g. a dressing or tape. Talk to your doctor or pharmacist if you find your patch does not stick very well
- Wash your hands after touching a patch. (NHS, 2023)

You can have showers, baths or go swimming, but do check the patch is still on properly afterwards and dry the area around the patch carefully.

How Buprenorphine patches work

Buprenorphine is a pain medication released steadily over the course of the week directly into the blood stream.

Once Buprenorphine is in your bloodstream, it will then be carried around your body and will then finally reach your brain. When the medication has reached the brain, this is where it will act to provide relief from your pain, regardless of where your pain may be coming from.



(Figure 1) How Buprenorphine works in your body.

Removing and changing your Buprenorphine patch

Your patch will be worn for 7 days depending on the preparation you have been prescribed. This will give you continuous pain relief. You will need to change it on the same day each week.

To remove the old patch relatively easily and painlessly, start peeling the patch carefully and slowly from one corner. Some people find it easier to remove patches whilst in the shower.

Make sure you dispose of the old patch out of the reach of children and animals, folding it in on itself and then into an empty pouch (see below) before placing it directly in your outside bin.

Applying a new patch

- Ensure you have taken the old patch off
- Fold it in half with the sticky side inwards
- Open and take out a new patch, using the empty pouch to dispose of the old patch. Now discard the pouch and old patch safely
- Even used patches contain some active ingredient that may be harmful to children or animals, so make sure your used patches are always **kept out** of sight and reach
- Find an alternative site to stick your next patch, you should not apply a new patch to the same site for 3-4 weeks
- Remember to change your patch at the same time of day, to help you remember this make a note of the date and time that you change the patch

You can apply your next Buprenorphine patch to any of the locations as listed below:

- Right upper outer arm
- Right side of the chest

- Right upper chest
- Left upper chest
- Left side of the chest
- Left upper outer arm
- Right upper back
- Left upper back

Remember once applied to one of these locations it is important to not reapply to the same location for at least 3-4 weeks. (NHS, 2023)

What if I experience an allergic reaction?

Remove your patch and inform your doctor or clinician immediately.

If your symptoms are life threatening, then call 999 immediately!

Reactions may include:

- Breathing difficulties
- Swelling, particularly to the face, lips and eyelids
- Itching, rashes, maybe rashes all over the entire body.
- Wheezing

For any of these, remove your patch immediately!

Special care - avoid extreme heat

Do not expose the patch to extreme heat (e.g. heating pads, electric blanket, heat lamps, sauna, hot tubs, heated water beds, hot water bottle etc). This may lead to larger quantities of the active ingredient being absorbed into your blood stream and result in adverse harm such as opioid toxicity. External heat may also prevent the patch from sticking properly. If you have a high temperature this may alter the effects of Buprenorphine patches as described above. (NHS, 2022). On prescribing the Buprenorphine patch your doctor will inform you that this

patch will now replace your previous opiate medications for example Codeine and Tramadol.

What if my patch falls off?

In the unlikely event that your patch falls off before it needs changing, do not use the same patch again. Replace with a new one in a new location straight away (NHS, 2022).

Important - Note the day that you applied the patch, as this becomes the new day of the week on which to change future Buprenorphine patches.

I forgot to change my patch

Change your patch as soon as you remember. Do not add more patches to make up for it. If you are more than a day late of changing the old patch, the day you apply the new one will become the new day you change it a week later

What if I am going on holiday?

Because Buprenorphine is a controlled drug, if you are going abroad, you must remember to contact your doctor/pain specialist to get a letter to explain that you have been prescribed Buprenorphine patches. It would be wise for you to check with the embassy of the country you are visiting to find out if they require further information, so that you are able to be granted access to the country you are traveling to, without any issues of you taking your Buprenorphine patches.

What if I feel sick?

Some people may feel sick during the first week.

- Try not to worry this is normal while your body adapts to the Buprenorphine

- If your nausea becomes troublesome your doctor or clinical specialist can prescribe you some anti-sickness medication to help with this

Possible side effects

Common side effects

These common side effects of buprenorphine happen in more than 1 in 100 people. There are things you can do to help cope with them:

- Having a dry mouth
- Constipation
- High mood
- Low blood pressure
- Difficulty of passing urine (*wee*)
- Hallucinations (*seeing things that are not there*)
- Feeling or being sick (nausea or vomiting)
- Feeling sleepy or tired
- Feeling dizzy or a sensation of spinning (vertigo)
- Confusion
- Headaches
- Stomach pain
- Itching or skin rashes

(This is not an exhaustive list)

Speak to a doctor, clinician or pharmacist if the side effects are becoming problematic and they do not ease or go away. (NHS, 2023)

What if I still have pain?

When you apply your 1st Buprenorphine patch or have had your dose increased by medical professional, then this can take up to three days for the Buprenorphine to reach its optimum pain-relieving effect. You can

Speak to your specialist pain team or GP if your pain is still not managed so that a new plan can be put in place.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding your Buprenorphine patch that has not been covered in this leaflet, then please contact your GP or your specialist pain management team for further advice.

Contact details

Should you require further advice or information please contact:
Pain Management Services: **01772 522687**.

Sources of further information

www.lancsteachinghospitals.nhs.uk
www.nhs.uk

www.accessable.co.uk

www.patient.co.uk

www.lancsteachinghospitals.nhs.uk/veteran-aware

<https://bepartofresearch.nihr.ac.uk/>

How and when to use buprenorphine-Brand names: Butec, Buvidal, Espranor, Suboxone, Subutex (NHS 2023)

<https://www.nhs.uk/medicines/buprenorphine-for-pain/how-and-when-to-use-buprenorphine/>

Faculty of Pain Medicine of the Royal College of Anaesthetists (no date)
Taking opioids for pain.

<https://fpm.ac.uk/opioids-aware-information-patients/taking-opioids-pain>

NHS (2023) Side effects of buprenorphine -Brand names: Butec, Buvidal, Espranor, Suboxone, Subutex.

<https://www.nhs.uk/medicines/buprenorphine-for-pain/side-effects-of-buprenorphine/>

The Royal Marsden NHS Foundation Trust (2025) Buprenorphine patch for pain relief.

<https://patientinformationlibrary.royalmarsden.nhs.uk/buprenorphine-patch-pain-relief>

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patientexperienceandinvolem@LTHTR.nhs.uk

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