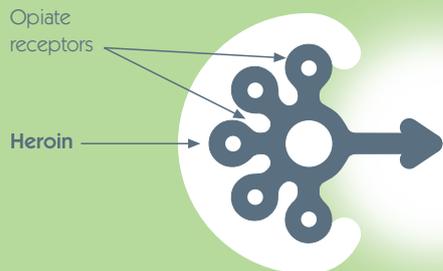


Drugs work by stimulating receptors in the brain. These pictures show how Subutex 'sticks' to the opiate receptors stopping heroin having any effect and, at the same time, stimulating them enough to take away, or reduce, the desire to take heroin.

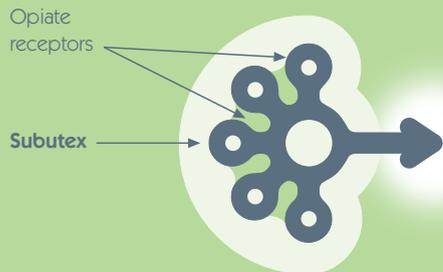
Heroin



Heroin

fits the receptors almost perfectly and strongly stimulates them.

Buprenorphine (Subutex)



Subutex

doesn't stimulate the opiate receptors strongly, **but** it does stick to them very well, preventing withdrawals, reducing cravings, and reducing or stopping heroin having any effect.

TREATMENT CHOICES

METHADONE [PHYSEPTONE]

BUPRENORPHINE [SUBUTEX]

LOFEXIDINE [BRITLOFEX]

NALTREXONE [OPIZONE | NALOREX]

SUBOXONE [SUBUTEX + NALOXONE]

There are a number of drugs that can be prescribed to help you if you are dependent on opiates like heroin.

There is not, and never will be, a 'magic cure' that can stop everyone taking opiates. And there is no perfect long-term replacement for everyone using heroin.

However, the drug treatments, and help from the services that offer them, might be able to help you make any changes you want to make.

This leaflet is one of a series designed to help you understand what you can expect from the different drug treatments that may be on offer.

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EXCHANGE
SUPPLIES

TREATMENT CHOICES

buprenorphine
[SUBUTEX]

DETOX

MAINTENANCE



Long-lasting

Buprenorphine is sold in the UK under the trade name **Subutex**. It is a long-acting opiate that you take as a pill that dissolves under the tongue.

Subutex is **more strongly attracted** to the opiate receptors in the brain than heroin (and methadone), and sticks very tightly to them (see the pictures over the page).

Because Subutex sticks so well to the opiate receptors, you can take it just once a day to start with. And, once you are stable in your treatment, you may be comfortable taking it once every two or three days.

Heroin blocking

Subutex binds so tightly to the opiate receptors that taking heroin on top has little or no effect. This is because it can't get to the receptors to stimulate them.

If there is heroin or methadone in your system when you first take Subutex, it will 'kick' them off the receptors. This means that if you are prescribed Subutex, **it's got to be at least 12 hours since you last took heroin, and 24 to 36 hours since you last took methadone, before you can take the first dose. If not, you will go into instant, severe withdrawals.**

Feeling 'normal'

The way Subutex works means that although it can still stimulate the opiate receptors enough to prevent withdrawals, most people who take it don't get a strong opiate effect.

This can be a real plus if you are fed up with the highs and lows of using heroin or if you:

- haven't been using for very long;
- have low tolerance;
- are on a low methadone dose; or
- find methadone really slows you down.

However, some people find it leaves them feeling 'too normal'. This tends to be more of a problem for people who are using a lot of heroin (particularly injectors) to get a hit (rather than just avoid withdrawals) and those using combinations of other drugs with heroin.

If you feel comfortable with the 'limited opiate effect', **Subutex can work well as a long-term maintenance treatment** to help you stop using heroin and get stable.

Detox

If you are ready to come off opiates and want to detox, **the physical withdrawals from Subutex are usually less severe than those from heroin or methadone.** Because of this, Subutex is being prescribed more and more often for detox.

Switching

You can't take methadone and Subutex at the same time. If you are on methadone and think Subutex might work better for you (see 'Feeling normal') for maintenance or detox, you usually have to reduce the methadone dose to 30 milligrams to prevent withdrawal symptoms during the changeover.

Overdose

The other major advantage Subutex has is that it is not as dangerous as methadone or heroin in overdose. However, people have died taking combinations of Subutex with alcohol or tranquillisers such as valium.