

# **Bupropion (Wellbutrin) for ADHD — Patient Information Handout**

## **What is bupropion (Wellbutrin)?**

Bupropion is a medication that is FDA-approved for treating depression and helping people quit smoking. Your doctor has prescribed it "off-label" to help manage your ADHD (Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder). Off-label means the medication is being used for a condition it was not originally approved for, but there is medical evidence supporting its use. This is a common and accepted practice in medicine.

## **How does bupropion help with ADHD?**

Bupropion works by increasing the levels of two brain chemicals — dopamine and norepinephrine — that play important roles in attention, focus, and impulse control. These are the same brain chemicals that are involved in ADHD. Unlike stimulant ADHD medications (such as Adderall or Ritalin), bupropion is not a controlled substance and has a low risk of misuse.

## **How should I take this medication?**

- Swallow the tablet whole. Do not crush, chew, or break it.
- Take it at the same time(s) each day, with or without food.
- Your doctor will likely start you on a low dose and gradually increase it over several days to weeks.
- Typical doses range from 150 mg to 450 mg per day, depending on the formulation.
- Do not take more than your doctor prescribes. Taking too much increases the risk of seizures.
- If you miss a dose, take it as soon as you remember — but if it is close to the time of your next dose, skip the missed dose. Never double up.

## **How long does it take to work?**

You may begin to notice some improvement in focus and attention within the first 1-2 weeks, but it can take several weeks to feel the full benefit. Do not stop taking the medication without talking to your doctor first.

### **What are the common side effects?**

Most side effects are mild and may improve as your body adjusts to the medication:

- Dry mouth
- Headache
- Nausea
- Trouble sleeping (insomnia)
- Dizziness
- Constipation
- Sweating
- Tremor (shakiness)
- Loss of appetite
- Anxiety or restlessness

### **What are the serious side effects I should watch for?**

Contact your doctor or seek medical attention right away if you experience any of the following:

- Seizures (convulsions) — this is the most important risk. The risk increases at higher doses (above 450 mg/day).
- New or worsening depression, anxiety, agitation, or thoughts of self-harm or suicide.
- Unusual changes in mood or behavior, including hostility, panic attacks, or feeling very restless.
- Rapid or irregular heartbeat.

- Severe allergic reaction — rash, hives, swelling of the face/tongue/throat, difficulty breathing.
- Eye pain, swelling, or vision changes (could be a sign of a rare eye condition called angle-closure glaucoma).

### **Who should NOT take bupropion?**

Do not take bupropion if you:

- Have a seizure disorder (epilepsy).
- Have or have had an eating disorder (anorexia nervosa or bulimia).
- Are currently stopping alcohol, benzodiazepines (such as Xanax or Valium), barbiturates, or anti-seizure medications abruptly.
- Are taking a monoamine oxidase inhibitor (MAOI) or have taken one within the last 14 days.
- Have had an allergic reaction to bupropion in the past.

### **What medications can interact with bupropion?**

Tell your doctor about all medications you take, including over-the-counter drugs and supplements. Important interactions include:

- MAOIs (e.g., phenelzine, tranylcypromine, selegiline) — must not be taken with bupropion.
- Medications that lower the seizure threshold, such as other antidepressants, antipsychotics, theophylline, or systemic steroids.
- Blood thinners like clopidogrel or ticlopidine may increase bupropion levels.
- Bupropion can raise the levels of certain other medications in your body, including some antidepressants, beta-blockers, and heart rhythm medications. Your doctor may need to adjust doses.

**Important note about drug testing:** Bupropion can sometimes cause a false-positive result on urine drug tests for amphetamines. If you are subject to drug testing, let the testing facility know you are taking this medication.

## **Other important tips**

- Avoid or limit alcohol while taking bupropion, as alcohol can increase the risk of seizures.
- Tell your doctor if you are pregnant, planning to become pregnant, or breastfeeding.
- Do not stop taking bupropion suddenly without your doctor's guidance.
- Keep all follow-up appointments so your doctor can monitor your progress and check your blood pressure.

## **When to call your doctor**

- Side effects that bother you or do not go away.
- No improvement in your ADHD symptoms after several weeks.
- Any new or worsening mood changes, anxiety, or thoughts of self-harm.
- A seizure or any other serious reaction.

**Emergency:** Call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room if you have a seizure, difficulty breathing, or thoughts of harming yourself.