



Drug Coverage Policy

Effective Date12/1/2025
Coverage Policy Number.....IP0324
Policy Title.....Nuedexta

Nuedexta for Individual and Family Plans

- Nuedexta® (dextromethorphan hydrobromide and quinidine sulfate capsules – Avair)

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OVERVIEW

Nuedexta, a combination product containing dextromethorphan hydrobromide (DM) and quinidine sulfate, is indicated for the **treatment of pseudobulbar affect**.¹

The need for continued treatment should be reassessed periodically, as spontaneous improvement of pseudobulbar affect occurs in some patients.¹

Disease Overview

Pseudobulbar affect is a neurologic condition characterized by involuntary outbursts of laughing and/or crying incongruous or disproportionate to the patients' emotional state.^{2,7} There are many terms that have been used to describe this condition, including pathological laughing and crying, affective lability, emotional incontinence, emotionalism, and involuntary emotional expression disorder.⁷ Pseudobulbar affect, hypothesized to arise from disconnection of brainstem structures from cortical inhibition, is associated with underlying central nervous system disorders including stroke, traumatic brain injury, Alzheimer's disease, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), and multiple sclerosis (MS).² In addition to the effects of the underlying disorder, pseudobulbar affect can have a severe impact on well-being and social functioning and can be highly disabling, owing in part to the stigma attached to loss of emotional control. Episodes of laughing can also lead to respiratory compromise, especially in patients with a neurological disorder that already compromises respiratory function, such as ALS.⁷ For these reasons, treatment should be strongly considered in any patient with pseudobulbar affect. The goal of therapy is to reduce the frequency of attacks.

Clinical Efficacy

The efficacy of Nuedexta was established in one trial in patients with pseudobulbar affect with underlying ALS or MS.^{1,2} Two additional trials conducted with higher doses (DM 30 mg/quinidine 30 mg) provided supportive evidence.^{3,4} PRISM II, an open-label, 90-day, published study, evaluated Nuedexta in patients with pseudobulbar affect and a diagnosis of dementia, stroke, or traumatic brain injury (n = 367).⁸ Nuedexta was shown to be an effective treatment for pseudobulbar affect secondary to dementia, stroke, or traumatic brain injury, showing similar improvement to that reported in patients with pseudobulbar affect secondary to ALS or MS.

Guidelines

There are no guidelines specific to the management of pseudobulbar affect. However, the American Academy of Neurology (AAN) published an evidence-based guideline on the assessment and management of psychiatric disorders in individuals with MS (reaffirmed 2025).⁵ The guideline found that Nuedexta is possibly effective and may be considered for treating individuals with MS with pseudobulbar affect (Level C, one Class II study). Also, prior to the approval of Nuedexta, the AAN published a practice parameter on the care of the patient with ALS (reaffirmed 2023).⁶ With regard to pharmacologic measures to reduce pseudobulbar affect, the AAN concludes that the combination DM/quinidine product is probably effective for pseudobulbar affect in ALS based on one Class I study³, although side effects may limit its usefulness. Therefore, the AAN recommends that if approved by the FDA, and if side effects are acceptable, the combination DM/quinidine product should be considered for symptoms of pseudobulbar affect in patients with ALS (Level B). No other pharmacologic agents are addressed in the practice parameter for use in the management of pseudobulbar affect.

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POLICY STATEMENT

Prior Authorization is required for benefit coverage of Nuedexta. Because of the specialized skills required for evaluation and diagnosis of patients treated with Nuedexta as well as the monitoring required for adverse events and long-term efficacy, approval requires Nuedexta to be prescribed by or in consultation with a physician who specializes in the condition being treated. All approvals are provided for the duration noted below.

Documentation: Documentation is required where noted in the criteria as **[documentation required]**. Documentation may include, but is not limited to, chart notes, laboratory tests, claims records, and/or other information.

Nuedexta is considered medically necessary when the following are met:

FDA-Approved Indication

1. **Treatment of Pseudobulbar Affect.** Approve for 1 year if the patient meets **BOTH** of the following (A and B):
 - A) Patient has pseudobulbar affect associated with a chronic neurological condition **[documentation required]**; AND
Note: Examples of chronic neurological conditions include amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, multiple sclerosis, stroke, dementia, traumatic brain injury.
 - B) Nuedexta is prescribed by or in consultation with a neurologist.

Conditions Not Covered

Nuedexta for any other use is considered not medically necessary, including the following (this list may not be all inclusive; criteria will be updated as new published data are available):

1. **Heroin Detoxification.** Limited published data are available in patients undergoing heroin detoxification.⁹ The available study was conducted with the DM 30 mg/quinidine 30 mg formulation, using daily doses of DM 60 mg/quinidine 60 mg (dose cannot be achieved with Nuedexta capsules). There were no differences between DM/quinidine and placebo with regard to reducing opioid withdrawal symptoms.
2. **Levodopa-Induced Dyskinesia in Parkinson's Disease.** A single pilot study demonstrated benefit with dextromethorphan/quinidine for treating levodopa-induced dyskinesia in Parkinson's disease.¹² Larger studies with a longer treatment duration are needed to define the place in therapy for Nuedexta in this condition.
3. **Neuropathic Pain.** Limited published data are available in patients (n = 36) with diabetic peripheral neuropathic (DPN) pain (open-label tolerability study).¹⁰ The available study was conducted with the DM 30 mg/quinidine 30 mg formulation, using daily doses up to DM 120 mg/quinidine 120 mg (dose cannot be achieved with Nuedexta capsules). Higher daily doses of DM and quinidine (60 mg/60 mg and 90 mg/60 mg [doses cannot be achieved with Nuedexta capsules]) have also been evaluated in patients with DPN pain (n = 379) in one Phase III, randomized, placebo-controlled 13-week study.⁷ Both DM/quinidine treatment groups had significant reductions in mean daily pain scores vs. placebo. More data are needed to define the place in therapy of Nuedexta in the treatment of neuropathic pain.
4. **Psychosis-Related Aggression.** A case series (n = 4) supports DM/quinidine as a potential alternative to conventional regimens for treating aggression and impulsive behavior in patients with psychotic disorder.¹¹ More data are needed to define the place in therapy of Nuedexta in the treatment of psychosis-related aggression.

5. Treatment-Resistant Depression. A Phase II, open-label, proof-of-concept study (n = 20) demonstrated preliminary efficacy for DM 45 mg/quinidine 10 mg every 12 hours. This dosing could not be achieved with Nuedexta capsules.¹³ Additional data are needed to define the place in therapy for Nuedexta in the treatment of treatment-resistant depression.

References

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13. Murrugh JW, Wade E, Sayed S, et al. Dextromethorphan/quinidine pharmacotherapy in patients with treatment resistant depression: A proof of concept clinical trial. *J Affect Disord.* 2017;218:277-283.

Revision Details

Type of Revision	Summary of Changes	Date
Selected Revision	No criteria changes, minor format updates only.	12/01/2024

Annual Revision	<p>Updated policy title from "Dextromethorphan/quinidine (Nuedexta) for Individual and Family Plans" to "Nuedexta for Individual and Family Plans."</p> <p>Changed from "Pseudobulbar Affect" to "Treatment of Pseudobulbar Affect."</p> <p>Added [documentation required] to indication.</p>	12/1/2025

The policy effective date is in force until updated or retired.

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