

Mixing Methadone With Other Drugs Can Be Dangerous

Methadone interacts with many medications. This can change the safety of the methadone you are taking and potentially can cause withdrawal. It is important to tell your doctor about all of the drugs you take.

Combinations With Methadone That Can Result in Withdrawal Syndrome

Opiate analogs such as:

- Nubain
- Talwin
- Stadol

Opiate antagonists such as:

- Naloxone
- Naltrexone

Partial agonists such as:

- Buprenorphine
- Alcohol

How Long Will I Be on Methadone?

The longer you've been dependent on opioids, the more likely it is that you would benefit from being on methadone. Those who withdraw from methadone after short-term treatment are more likely to return to drug use than those who stay in treatment until they have obtained the optimal benefits.

Remember the risks that come with drug use: high rates of HIV and Hepatitis C infection among people who inject drugs, greater odds of committing crimes and going to prison, and possible death from overdose.

Recovery to a normal life is possible. You should stay in treatment as long as you are benefiting from it. The length of time you stay in MMT is an issue that should be decided solely by you and your physician. Some people are in MMT only for a few weeks, while others choose to stay in MMT indefinitely.

Ending Treatment

If you are thinking about ending MMT, talk with the doctor at the program. It can be a slow process to taper off of methadone. Though doses are tapered

slowly to reduce withdrawal symptoms, you may experience some aching, insomnia, and lack of appetite for a few weeks. You also may feel a sense of loss, sadness, and sleeplessness for months. However, over time this should dissipate.

Long-term withdrawal can take from 6 months up to a year before you can completely taper off of methadone treatment. You should never set time limitations on yourself—taper off at your own pace in cooperation with your treatment provider.

Throughout treatment and after treatment ends, be sure to maintain and extend your support network. You can request to come back to the program every few weeks for the first year and expect to have the same privileges that you did before tapering off. Should you feel that you may relapse, return to your program immediately for re-dosing. You always can return to treatment. Returning to treatment is not a failure—it's a choice about what is best for you.

Important Resources

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)
www.samhsa.gov

SAMHSA's National Helpline
1-800-662-HELP (4357)

SAMHSA's Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (CSAT)
www.csat.samhsa.gov

SAMHSA's National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information
1-800-SAY-NOTO (729-6686)
www.ncadi.samhsa.gov

SAMHSA's Substance Abuse Treatment Facility Locator
www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov

Patient Support and Community Education Project (PSCEP)
www.dpt.samhsa.gov/patient/index.htm



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What Every Individual Needs To Know About Methadone Maintenance Treatment

Introduction to Methadone

What Is Methadone?

Methadone is a long-acting opioid medication that is used as a pain reliever and, together with counseling and other psychosocial services, is used to treat individuals addicted to heroin and certain prescription drugs.

What Is Methadone Maintenance Treatment (MMT)?

MMT helps normalize your body's neurological and hormonal functions that have been impaired by the use of heroin or misuse of other short-acting opioids. Opioids are a group of drugs that act on the central nervous system. They include opiates such as codeine, morphine, and heroin as well as synthetic drugs such as oxycodone, oxycontin, hydrocodone, and methadone.

Appropriate MMT provides several benefits:

- Reduces or eliminates craving for opioid drugs
- Prevents the onset of withdrawal for 24 hours or more
- Blocks the effects of other opioids
- Promotes increased physical and emotional health
- Raises the overall quality of life of the patient.

Is Methadone Maintenance Treatment Right for You?

Have you been through detoxification and found you couldn't feel normal? MMT can allow you to regain a sense of normalcy.

Have you been using opioids such as heroin, codeine, or oxycodone but can't seem to stop? MMT can help you quit using those drugs and focus your life.

Are you pregnant and using heroin? Seek MMT right away to prevent miscarriage and protect your baby from life-threatening withdrawal.

Have you tested positive for HIV or Hepatitis C? If you have tested positive, MMT can allow you to regain your quality of life and begin essential treatment of your viral infection. If you have not tested positive, MMT can help you stop using needles, which is the primary route of infection for drug users.

Beginning MMT can help stabilize and improve your health and can move you toward getting the care you need.

Starting Methadone Maintenance Treatment

Depending on where you live, you may have a choice of methadone providers, or you may live in an area where methadone treatment is not available. If you have not already made contact with a doctor or clinic that treats opioid addiction, find out whether treatment is available nearby.

- **Talk with your family doctor.** Generally, your doctor is not authorized to prescribe methadone for addiction treatment or withdrawal management purposes. Ask to be referred to an authorized



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
Center for Substance Abuse Treatment
www.samhsa.gov

doctor or a methadone clinic, or ask whether other treatment options such as buprenorphine are available.

- **Contact a referral service.** To find the treatment provider closest to you, call SAMHSA's National Helpline at 1-800-662-HELP at any time of the day or night, or search online for a treatment facility at www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov.

Assessment

Assessment includes determining your history with drug use as well as a physical examination by a doctor. You should be asked about medical problems that are commonly associated with opioid addictions, and you may be asked to consent to a blood test to check for HIV, Hepatitis, and other infectious or sexually transmitted diseases.

Expect questions. You may be asked about your drug use, your physical and mental health, your home and family, and your employment.

Ask questions. What are you being tested for? What other services are available? Remember, knowledge is power.

You may be assessed again during treatment to review your progress.

Dosing

For safety, your first dose of methadone will be low or moderate. New patients usually start at a dose not to exceed 30 to 40 mgs. A larger dose of 60 to 120 mgs a day may be required for long-term maintenance. You and your physician should determine what dose works best for you.

Your dose is right when withdrawal symptoms, drug cravings, drowsiness, and side effects fade. With a correct dose, you should feel more energetic, clear-headed, and able to do the things that matter in your life. Until you have adjusted, make sure not to drive a car or operate heavy machinery.

You should discuss a dose adjustment with your doctor if you still are experiencing drug cravings. The majority of properly dosed patients have no physical desire to use other drugs.

Drug Testing

Routine tests of urine or oral fluids will show whether

you have been using other illicit or inappropriate drugs and whether you have been taking your methadone. You may have to give supervised samples to ensure they are yours. With continual negative results, you'll be asked to take drug tests less often.

If you test positive for other drugs, it may hold up your schedule for taking home doses, and your provider may ask that you take drug tests more often.

Some providers expect zero drug use while others are more tolerant.* If you test positive for a drug when you know you haven't used, you can request to be retested.

Confidentiality

Drug treatment patients are protected by special Federal confidentiality regulations. No one will be told you are in treatment or what you talk about in treatment, except for certain situations:

- Information about a client often is shared within a treatment team in the clinic.
- You may consent in writing that your information be shared under certain specified conditions—for example, to forward your records to another doctor or clinic.
- If your doctor or counselor has reason to think you might hurt yourself or others, he or she must inform others.
- If you are facing trial, the court may subpoena your treatment records.
- If you test positive for HIV and other communicable diseases, these facts will be shared with public health officials. In certain States, your intimate partners at risk for these diseases may be told that they have been exposed.

Living With Methadone

Take Home Doses

At the start of treatment, you will have to go to the clinic daily to take your dose under observation. This daily contact confirms to the staff that you are taking the dose ordered by the physician. It also helps the staff to see if your dose is enough or too much and

*No one should be discharged solely on the basis of drug test results.

whether you are experiencing side effects, in which case an adjustment may be necessary. After a few months, your provider may let you take home or "carry" doses for unsupervised use. Ask to find out when and under what conditions you will be given carry doses.

It is likely that you will be asked to sign an agreement claiming responsibility for using and storing the doses safely. Your provider may take away your take-home privileges if you do not comply with the agreement or if your drug tests are positive for drug use.

Safety and Storage

Your maintenance dose of methadone could seriously harm or kill someone who has no tolerance for the drug. Take precautions:

- Never transfer your medication to a container that might make it easier to mistake what's inside.
- Keep your doses in a locked box, such as one sold for fishing tackle or cash.

Hospital Stays

If you are admitted to the hospital, let the staff there know that you are a methadone patient. This is vital so that you can receive your dose and because other drugs can be dangerous if combined with methadone. Urge the hospital staff to talk with your MMT doctor about your medication and care.

Dealing With Side Effects

Methadone maintenance carries some side effects:

- **Constipation.** Eat foods that are high in fiber and drink plenty of water. You also should avoid foods that are high in fat; they are harder to digest and tend to make your system sluggish.
- **Excessive sweating.** Adjusting the dose may stop the sweating, and there are other medications available to help control this.
- **Changes in sex drive.** Some people on methadone have little sex drive and are unable to have an orgasm. You may be taking a medication that affects your sex drive. Talk with your doctor about possible treatments that will improve this side effect.

Methadone and Employment

Once you're on a stable dose of methadone, it shouldn't affect the work you do or how well you do your job. For most jobs, there's no need to mention that you take methadone. Your employer has no right to know.

HIV, Hepatitis, and Methadone

Methadone can be a great benefit if you are HIV/AIDS or Hepatitis B (HBV) or C (HCV) positive. Methadone allows you to lead a "normal" life so it's

easier to take care of yourself, to eat better, and to take your medication at the right times. However, prescription drugs for your HIV/AIDS or HBV/HCV may interfere with methadone, and your dose may need to be changed. Talk with the program doctor about other drugs you have been prescribed.

Patient Rights and Responsibilities

If you are unhappy with your treatment—for example, you feel your dose has not been adjusted correctly—talk it over with your doctor or counselor. If a treatment problem hasn't been fixed to your satisfaction by talking with your doctor or counselor, you may consider changing your provider.

You also can anonymously report problems with your treatment provider to his/her accrediting agency. To learn more about grievance procedures, you can visit the Patient Support and Community Education Project online at www.dpt.samhsa.gov/patient/index.htm.

As a patient in treatment, you are protected by a set of Medication-Assisted Treatment Patient Rights and Responsibilities. You can see the SAMHSA Guidelines for the Accreditation of Opioid Treatment Programs online at www.dpt.samhsa.gov/guidelines.pdf.

Methadone and Pain Relief

Methadone can provide effective pain relief. Yet, once you are on a stable dose of methadone, you may be tolerant to its pain-relieving effects and may require additional pain medication. Some MMT patients need more pain medication than patients who are not a part of MMT.

Tips on Taking Methadone

- Methadone usually works best when it's taken once a day at the same time every day.
- You drink your dose of methadone, usually in a mixture with orange juice.
- It takes a few days to feel the full effects of a dose adjustment.
- Taking other drugs may interfere with the adjustment of your dose.
- Taking more opioids won't get you high, but you could overdose.
- Hang in there—give it 2 to 6 weeks to find the right dose.