



Your Medication: Methadone

How do I obtain and take my medication?

- ▶ You will be referred to an Opioid Treatment Program (OTP) to receive methadone for opioid use disorder (OUD). OTPs typically see patients within 24 hours of initial referral. Methadone can only be used to treat OUD in patients who are part of a certified treatment program.
- ▶ When starting treatment, you will have to visit your OTP each day to receive a once daily dose of methadone. Over time, as you continue working with the program, you may be able to receive a supply to take home with you to last for several days or more. OTPs may only treat patients age 18 or older with methadone, but buprenorphine is available and FDA approved as an alternative for adolescents.
- ▶ Methadone for opioid use disorder is usually dispensed as an oral liquid. Using a liquid allows providers to easily customize doses to meet each patient's specific needs. Liquid doses must be measured carefully, with a medical measuring device (not a household spoon) to ensure that the proper dose is given.

Concentrated liquid will be mixed with water or other liquid before taking, as determined by your OTP. Some OTPs may send you home with dissolvable tablets (diskettes). These should be dissolved in 4 oz of water, orange juice or other acidic fruit beverage. Once dissolved, drink the entire amount. If residue remains, add a little more water/juice and drink.

- ▶ If you miss a dose, please contact your OTP as soon as you remember. If it is close to the time for your next dose, they will likely have you skip the missed dose and return to your normal dosing schedule. You should not take two doses to make up for the missed dose.

What can I expect while starting methadone?

- ▶ Patients may experience side effects with methadone, especially when first starting. Methadone will help manage withdrawal symptoms, but it can take a few days for your symptoms to stabilize and for you to begin feeling more comfortable.

Common side effects include: nausea, vomiting, constipation, decreased appetite, stomach pain, dizziness, sleepiness, weakness, headache, sweating and weight gain.

- ▶ Side effects are **much more common** when **first beginning** methadone, and most tend to become less noticeable after adjusting to your treatment.

How does it work?

- ▶ Methadone is a long-acting full opioid agonist that binds to opioid mu receptors and decreases the effects of physical dependence on opioids (withdrawal symptoms & cravings). It can cause effects such as euphoria and respiratory depression. Methadone can decrease or block the effects of other opioids taken.

What else do I need to know about it? Is it safe?

- ▶ Medications for Opioid Use Disorder are a valuable component of a well rounded approach to recovery. Patients have the most success with methadone when used in combination with counseling, peer support services and/or other validated support services.
- ▶ Do not stop taking this medication without consulting your provider. Stopping it without tapering off



results in a much greater risk of relapse. The length of time that a patient is treated with methadone can vary, but usually is a minimum of 12 months. Some patients may take it indefinitely.

- ▶ Methadone is considered safe when used as directed, and is a positive step into recovery. It is a recommended treatment for Opioid Use Disorder in pregnancy, and is recommended to be continued while breastfeeding (especially right after birth when it was used during pregnancy).
- ▶ **If you experience any of the following symptoms, please seek medical help right away.** These symptoms could be caused by withdrawal from other opioids when starting methadone, or could signify a dangerous reaction to the medication: *Signs of allergic reaction (rash, hives, itching, wheezing, tightness in chest or throat, trouble breathing, swallowing or talking, unusual hoarseness or swelling of mouth, face, lips, tongue or throat), signs of low potassium levels (like muscle pain, weakness, muscle cramps or abnormal heartbeat), signs of low magnesium levels (like mood changes, muscle pain or weakness, muscle cramps or spasms, seizures, shakiness, decreased appetite, severe upset stomach, vomiting or abnormal heartbeat), signs of low blood sugar (like dizziness, headache, feeling sleepy, feeling weak, shaking, fast heartbeat, confusion, hunger or sweating), changes in eyesight, feeling extremely nervous or excitable, changes in balance, depression or other mood changes, confusion, changes in muscle movement (extra movement, or slower movement), slurred speech, feeling drunk, a heartbeat that feels abnormal, noisy breathing, breathing problems during sleep, seizures, trouble passing urine, shortness of breath, an excessive weight gain, swelling of arms or legs, unexplained bruising or bleeding, changes in eyesight or inability to control eye movements, feeling very sleepy, dizzy or passing out, agitation, hallucinations, stiffness, seizures or shaking, excessive sweating, severe diarrhea, vomiting or severe headache.*
- ▶ A type of abnormal heartbeat (prolonged QT interval) has happened with methadone. Sometimes, this has caused a condition called Torsades de Pointes (another unsafe abnormal heartbeat). Call your provider right away if you experience a fast or abnormal heartbeat, or if you pass out.
- ▶ Ensure that all of your healthcare providers (including doctors, nurses, pharmacists and dentists) are aware that you take methadone.
- ▶ Methadone may affect certain laboratory tests.
- ▶ Avoid driving or operating machinery until you can see how methadone affects you.
- ▶ It is recommended that all patients prescribed an opioid or Medication for Opioid Use Disorder are prescribed naloxone to treat an opioid overdose, if needed. Opioid overdoses are more likely to happen during a relapse, as tolerance typically decreases. If an opioid overdose has occurred, or if naloxone has been used, it is important to contact emergency services right away. Naloxone wears off after a short period of time, and the overdose may reoccur.
- ▶ Even one dose of methadone can be deadly if taken by someone else or by accident, especially in children. If methadone is taken by someone other than you, it is important to get medical help right away.
- ▶ Severe side effects have occurred when methadone has been used in combination with alcohol, marijuana, other forms of cannabis, other opioids or other medications that cause drowsiness or slowed actions. These effects include slow or troubled breathing, and death.
- ▶ Use during pregnancy may cause symptoms of withdrawal in the baby. Ensure that your OB provider is aware that you take methadone, as they will manage this risk to provide the safest possible outcomes.

Storage: methadone is often stored in a hospital, doctors office, or clinic. When storing at home, methadone should be stored at room temperature in a cool, dry place (not a bathroom) and it should be protected from light. It should be stored in a safe place where children cannot see or reach it, and



where others can not get to it. Consider storing it in a locked box. Keep away from pets.

Unused or expired methadone should be disposed of safely. Contact your local pharmacy for information on disposal and drug take-back programs in your area.

Adapted from www.uptodate.com and www.samhsa.gov