

# Methadone for Opioid Use Disorder

Methadone is a medication used to treat opioid use disorder. It is long-acting, which means it stays in the body a long time.

Methadone is an opioid. It helps lower withdrawal symptoms from opioids (like heroin, hydromorphone, morphine, codeine, and others). It will not help with withdrawal from other substances.

When a person is given the right dose (amount), methadone does not give a feeling of being high.

## How do I take this medication?

- Methadone (for opioid use disorder) comes as a liquid mixed with juice.
- It is usually taken once a day, but sometimes it may be taken 2 times a day.
- Your health care team will work with you to find the right dose to help you manage your withdrawal symptoms and cravings.

## How fast does this medication start to work?

- When you start taking methadone, you will feel the effects within 2 hours.
- It can take 5 to 10 days of regular use to see the full effects of a dose. It will take several days for the level of methadone to go up in your blood. Once you are taking the right dose, you will be able to take the dose daily without having opioid withdrawal symptoms.

## How will my health care team find the right dose for me?

- The starting dose for methadone is different for each person and is based on many factors (like your risk of overdose).
- Your health care team will work closely with you to adjust your dose until your withdrawal symptoms and cravings are not as strong. For each dose adjustment, you will need to be checked by a prescriber.
- **Once you are taking the right dose, methadone can:**
  - › lower opioid withdrawal symptoms.
  - › lower cravings.

## How long will I need to take this medication?

- How long you need to take methadone is different for each person.
- Once you are stable and have a lower risk of using opioids again, ask your health care team about slowly lowering your dose.

## Does this medication interact with other medications?

- **Methadone can interact (change how the medication works) with other medications.** Always check any medications with your health care team and pharmacist before taking them, including over-the-counter medications, herbal products, and supplements.
- **It can be dangerous to take methadone with other drugs that slow down your central nervous system (like alcohol, benzodiazepines, gabapentin, pregabalin [Lyrica®], or other opioids).** The nervous system controls most of your body's functions (like breathing, thinking, and heartbeat).

- **Do not take any opioids, benzodiazepines (medications for anxiety and insomnia [not being able to sleep]), or drink alcohol when taking methadone. This can cause poisoning, overdose, and even death.**
- **If you come to the pharmacy and are impaired (under the influence of drugs or alcohol), you may not get your methadone dose. This is for your safety.**

## What else do I need to know about this medication?

- If you miss 4 doses of methadone:
  - › Your tolerance to methadone and opioids can go down. When you miss doses, your body will be less used to taking methadone, and you may feel the effect of the opioid more.
  - › **You are at a higher risk of overdose.** Your dose will need to be changed after you are assessed by your prescriber.
- **It is important to take your methadone dose daily as prescribed.**

## What are the possible side effects?

- Not everyone will have side effects. They usually happen early in treatment or when you are taking a higher dose. Side effects may include:
  - › Constipation (not being able to poop)
  - › Sweating a lot
  - › Dry mouth
  - › Less interest in sex
  - › Drowsiness (sleepiness)
  - › Weight gain
  - › Insomnia (not able to sleep)
- All opioids, including methadone, can cause intoxication and overdose. This may happen when the dose is too high.
- Signs of intoxication include:
  - › Sedation (feeling drowsy or sleepy)
  - › Slowed or slurred speech
  - › Moving slowly
  - › Euphoria (feeling very happy or excited)
  - › Dysphoria (feeling uneasy)
  - › Pinpoint pupils (pupils are very small in normal light)

- Signs of overdose include:
  - › Slow or shallow breathing
  - › Slow heartbeat and low blood pressure
  - › Severe (very bad) sedation (very drowsy or sleepy)
  - › Cardiac arrest (heart stops beating)
  - › Death

- **The risk of an opioid overdose and death is highest during the first 2 weeks of treatment. If you are feeling sleepy, make sure to tell your health care team or pharmacist.**
- **Because of the risk of overdose, you will be given a naloxone kit. Your health care team will show you how to use it.**

This pamphlet is for educational purposes only. It is not intended to replace the advice or professional judgment of a health care provider. The information may not apply to all situations. If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.

Find all patient education resources here:  
[www.nshealth.ca/patient-education-resources](http://www.nshealth.ca/patient-education-resources)

Connect with a registered nurse in Nova Scotia any time:  
Call 811 or visit: <https://811.novascotia.ca>

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