



Patient & Family Guide  
2020

# Using Methadone for Chronic Pain

Aussi disponible en français :  
*La méthadone pour traiter la douleur chronique*  
(FF85-2193)



[www.nshealth.ca](http://www.nshealth.ca)

# Using Methadone for Chronic Pain

## How can methadone help me?

Methadone is an opioid analgesic (painkiller). It is often used to manage chronic pain.

Methadone is a good choice compared to other opioid pain medications because it is less expensive.

## How do I take methadone?

- You must take this medication exactly as your health care provider tells you to.
- Only raise or lower your dose exactly as your health care provider tells you to.
- **Do not stop taking this medication suddenly or you may have withdrawal symptoms.**
- Methadone may be taken with or without food.



## **When do I take methadone?**

- It is best to take this medication at evenly spaced times during the day (every 8 to 12 hours).
- How often you take a dose is different from person to person. Please follow the dosage schedule prescribed by your health care provider.

## **What if I miss a dose?**

If you miss a dose, take it as soon as possible. Do not take the missed dose if it is less than 4 hours before your next dose. Then go back to your regular schedule.

**Do not take a double dose.**

## **Special precautions**

- Talk to your health care provider before taking this medication if you are pregnant or breastfeeding.
- **Do not stop taking this medication unless your health care provider tells you to do so.**
- Raise or lower your dose exactly as your health care provider tells you to. This will help you get the best pain relief and the fewest side effects.

- **Methadone stays in the body longer than other pain medications and can build up in your system. This means that you should be monitored closely by your health care provider and/or Pain Management Unit nurse when starting the medication.**
- **Do not stop taking this medication all of a sudden as you may have withdrawal symptoms.** If your health care provider asks you to take more or less, or stop taking it, your dose will be changed **slowly over time.**
- Tell your dentist, and any new health care providers or pharmacists, that you are taking methadone.
- Methadone may make you light-headed or drowsy. Make sure you know how your body reacts to this medication before you drive, use machines, or do other jobs where you need to be alert and able to see well.
- Check with your health care provider before you take any other medications.
- **Do not drink alcohol while taking this medication.**



Call your health care provider or the Pain Management Unit at 902-473-7672 if you have pain that keeps getting worse for more than one week.

## **What side effects can happen while I am taking methadone?**

You may have some side effects when you start taking methadone. Many side effects will go away within 2 weeks of starting the medication.

**Call your health care provider or the Pain Management Unit if any of the following side effects are bothering you:**

- › headaches
- › dizziness and/or vertigo
- › drowsiness
- › constipation
- › nausea (feeling sick to your stomach)
- › muscle twitching or lack of control
- › confusion
- › hallucinations
- › more sensitivity to pain
- › sweating

## Call your health care provider right away if you:

- › are very tired
- › are sleeping all the time
- › have confusion and/or hallucinations
- › have slowed breathing or any breathing problems

## How do I store my methadone?

- **We strongly recommend storing your methadone in a locked box.**
- Keep methadone and all other medications out of the reach of children and pets.
- Store liquid forms in the fridge **in a locked box** so that they don't mix with other items such as food and/or drinks.
- Liquid forms can be taken as is, or mixed with juice.
- Store tablets at room temperature (15-30° C).
- Do not store medications in a damp place such as the bathroom.



# Notes:

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### **Looking for more health information?**

Find this pamphlet and all our patient resources here: <http://library.nshealth.ca/PatientGuides>

Contact your local public library for books, videos, magazines, and other resources.

For more information, go to <http://library.novascotia.ca>

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

Learn about other programs and services in your community: call 211 or visit <http://ns.211.ca>

*Nova Scotia Health Authority promotes a smoke-free, vape-free, and scent-free environment.*

*Please do not use perfumed products. Thank you!*

[www.nshealth.ca](http://www.nshealth.ca)

*Prepared by: Pain Management Unit*

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The information is not intended to be and does not constitute health care or medical advice.

If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.

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The information in this pamphlet is to be updated every 3 years or as needed.