

Pain Management Centre Methadone Information Leaflet

What is Methadone?

Methadone is a strong painkiller (an opioid) and can be used to treat long-term pain in certain situations. It can be helpful in relieving nerve (neuropathic) pain. It is not suitable for everybody and an assessment will be undertaken to check existing medications or conditions that can interact with the methadone.

How do I take Methadone?

- Methadone is usually taken 3 times a day for the first 5 days. In most cases it is reduced to twice daily after 5 days.
- If methadone is suitable and we agree to convert you this, you will be monitored closely through regular appointments.
- It may be necessary to adjust your methadone dose to give you the most effective pain relief with minimal side effects.
- You must never take more than the prescribed amount and do not stop taking your methadone suddenly or miss a dose. If you plan to stop please contact your doctor or the pain management centre first.

What if I am already on other opioid medication?

- Methadone will normally be started to replace your existing opioid medication.
- The dose is carefully calculated to take into account your previous dose of opioid.
- You will be advised how to manage the changeover from your usual opioid medication to methadone.

How long will it take to work?

- Methadone can take 24 – 48 hours before any improvement in pain is noticed. It can take up to 7 days before you feel the full benefit.
- It is important to take your methadone regularly as prescribed, directed by the prescription.

What are the side effects?

Methadone has similar side effects to other opioid medication which can sometimes be greater. Although you could still get unpleasant effects when you start with methadone, they will usually reduce. We expect them to improve when the dose is stabilised and we establish how much you need. The main side effects include:

- Drowsiness and confusion, this is more common when you first start methadone or if the dose is increased. This usually improves within 1- 2 weeks.
- Nausea, this is more common when you first start methadone. Your doctor can prescribe anti-sickness medication if required.
- Constipation, your doctor can prescribe medication if required.

- You should not drive or operate machinery until your methadone dose is stable and you no longer feel drowsy.
- Other side effects of methadone will be explained in the leaflet that comes with your medication from pharmacy.

Common concerns about Methadone

- Methadone is often known for being used for substance misuse. Patients frequently have concerns and worries about the negative associations with methadone.
- The use of Methadone prescription and dispensing in substance misuse is different from the way methadone is prescribed for pain management.
- Please discuss any concerns you have at your next appointment or contact us by telephone between appointments.
- As with all medication ensure your methadone is safely stored away from children to avoid accidents.
- Never share your medication. Methadone is prescribed specifically to you and may cause harm to others.
- For further information regarding methadone and driving see:
<https://www.gov.uk/drug-driving-law>

Although methadone is a very good painkiller, it requires more experience in prescribing than morphine than other strong opioids, because the dose of methadone needed is very different from one person to another. This means that the team need to skilfully adjust your methadone dose initially whilst trying to control your pain.

Methadone is an opioid based analgesia and we will ideally aim to reduce the dose as tolerated due to concerns around long term based opioid analgesia and will assess each situation on a risk / balance benefit.

<https://fpm.ac.uk/opioids-aware-clinical-use-opioids/opioids-long-term-pain>