

## What is Methadone?

Methadone is a medication prescribed to people with opioid use disorder and chronic pain. Taken daily at a regular time, it helps manage withdrawal and cravings. It is long acting, which means it works slowly in your body.

Methadone comes in two different formulations: Methadose and Metadol-D. Both have the same concentration of medication. Methadose is pink and cherry flavoured. Metadol-D is clear and unflavoured, diluted with Tang or Crystal Light. Both formulations contain sugar.

## Urine drug test

Urine drug tests are a part of your treatment. They are completely confidential and will not be shared with anybody. They are only used by your care provider to develop your treatment plan.

Methadone will not be refused if other substances are found in your urine. All test results are used for planning and supporting your care and goals.

## Starting your journey

Before being prescribed Methadone, you will be asked questions about your health and substance use history. This may include blood work, a urine test, electrocardiogram (ECG), and other tests as part of your wellness plan.

The starting dose usually is not enough to stop all cravings and withdrawal; this is for your safety. Your dose of Methadone may be increased every 3-5 days when taken consistently, as it takes time to build the full effect in your body. It is important to tell your health care provider about any cravings and if you have used substances. This allows them to provide you with options to make your treatment more comfortable.

If you use substances while on OAT, it will not affect your treatment plan and your medication will not be withheld. At all times before and during methadone treatment, talk to your care provider if you have any concerns.

## Taking Methadone

Methadone is a liquid medication. You will usually start by getting your Methadone every day from your local pharmacy or health centre. It's important to plan your schedule to ensure you do not miss any doses.

Once you and your health care provider have found the dose that works best for you, you may be able to take home doses of the medication. This will depend on several factors which your provider will discuss with you, including ability to safely store the medication.

Many people stay on methadone for a long time, as it supports their overall wellness and goals. Some people may also switch to a different type of medication- you can always talk to your provider about your options.

## Missed doses

It is important to take your methadone every day as prescribed. When you miss a dose, you may experience increased cravings and decreased tolerance. For your safety, if you miss four consecutive days of your methadone prescription it will need to be adjusted by your health care provider before you can continue.

To receive a new prescription you should reach out to your care provider as soon as possible. Discuss extra supports you may need to stay on the medication.



## Side effects

Everyone's journey with methadone will look a bit different. As with most medications, you may experience some side effects.

### Side effects may include:

- Drowsiness or dizziness  
It is safest not to drive or use heavy machinery when drowsy.
- Nausea or vomiting
- Constipation or stomach ache
- Excessive Sweating

It is important to report any side effects to your health care provider or pharmacist so they can support you to reduce them.

### Rare but Serious Side Effects:

- **Irregular Heartbeat**  
Methadone may lead to an irregular heartbeat, causing it to skip beats, beat faster, or slower. Your doctor may recommend a heart test, such as an electrocardiogram (ECG), to assess your heart's condition. If you suspect that your heart rate is being affected by this medication, contact your doctor immediately.
- **Serotonin Syndrome**  
This can occur when there is an excess of a brain chemical called serotonin in your body.

Early signs may include confusion, agitation, muscle twitching, sweating, shivering, or diarrhea. Severe symptoms can involve a high fever, seizures, irregular heartbeats, or fainting.

If you notice any early symptoms, **seek emergency care** right away. For serious symptoms, **call 911** immediately.

## Managing side effects

### Water

Drinking plenty of water can help with a number of side effects including excessive sweating, nausea, vomiting and bowel issues.

### Sleep

Sleep is an important part of your wellness journey. If you are having difficulty sleeping it is important to let your health care provider know. It may take time for your sleep to stabilize, and your healthcare provider can prescribe medications for sleep if needed during this period. Some ways to help improve your sleep include getting regular exercise, eating a small snack before bed, and developing a bedtime routine.

### Over-the-counter medications

Some common medications can help with symptoms, such as Ibuprofen for pain, or Gravol for nausea. Let your health care provider know about any over-the-counter medications you are taking, and ask about ways these might help manage side effects.

### Culture and community

Connection to culture and community can help support your health and wellness. This will look different for everyone but may include connecting with Elders or Traditional Knowledge Keepers in your community, taking part in land-based healing programs, or finding an activity that you enjoy. Connecting with peers and people with shared experiences can also support you in your healing journey.

### Stress management

Starting a new routine around taking methadone can cause a wide range of feelings and managing unwanted side effects may be stressful. If you are transitioning away from using unregulated opioids, you may experience many emotional and physical changes. Learning how to work with these emotions and thoughts can support you in your wellness journey.

It may be helpful to take five minute breaks throughout the day. Some activities that you can practice in these breaks include:

- Stretching
- Deep breathing
- Meditation
- Drawing
- Listening to music
- Going for a walk
- Doing an activity you enjoy
- Speak to someone you trust



# Wellness

Wellness is a balance of many factors, and as you begin your journey with Methadone it can be helpful to take some time to consider the ways that you can take care of your mental, emotional, physical and spiritual wellness. Continue to talk to your care provider about your goals for being on methadone and how this relates to your overall wellness.

## Mental

## Emotional

## Physical

## Spiritual

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# Staying safe

While taking Methadone it is important to let your health care provider know of any other medications or substances you may be taking. Some substances, such as alcohol or benzodiazepines, may increase your risk of both complications and / or overdose.

Always take your medication as prescribed to minimize risk of overdose. If your health status changes, please talk to your prescriber.

Please don't stop your OAT without support from your prescriber as it can cause withdrawals and increase risk of overdose if you use opioids.

If you are using other substances while prescribed methadone we recommend following harm reduction strategies:

- Don't use alone. Use with a buddy.
- Go to an overdose prevention site or use the Lifeguard app.
- Get your drugs checked if possible.
- Use a test dose: start low and go slow.
- Have a naloxone kit and know how to use it.
- Access new drug use equipment and don't share supplies.
- Use caution when mixing substances.

