

## Information Sheet

# Safely Taking Methadone for Pain

**Please read this leaflet carefully and share it with your family members or carers. It does not take the place of your healthcare provider's guidance or the methadone package insert.**

## What is methadone?

Your healthcare provider has prescribed methadone to help control pain. Methadone is a strong pain reliever that has been used successfully for more than 60 years in millions of people worldwide. It is a man-made, or synthetic, opioid (oh-pee-oyd) drug with actions similar to natural opioids like morphine or codeine that come from the opium poppy, except methadone is more potent.

Methadone is a very effective and economical medication. When used properly, it can safely relieve pain even when other medications fail. However, since it is long-lasting and powerful drug, its improper use or abuse can be harmful and even fatal (causing death). **Therefore, it is very important that you read, understand, and follow all of the safety instructions below.**

## Always take methadone exactly as directed

- **Taking extra methadone or combining with other drugs, alcohol, or over-the-counter products, unless approved by your healthcare provider, can be harmful or fatal.**
- Make sure the methadone prescriber knows of all healthcare products and drugs (prescribed or not) that you are using and your complete medical history.
- You must take only the prescribed amount of methadone and at the specified time intervals.
- If you were told to split methadone tablets, for the proper dose, ask your healthcare provider or pharmacist how to do it accurately.



**Tell all healthcare providers that you are taking methadone.**

- Tell **all** of your healthcare providers that you are taking methadone. Unless they know this, they might prescribe medications that alter methadone's effects. They should contact the methadone prescriber if there are questions
- Methadone builds up in the body over time, often taking a week or longer to achieve full effect. During that time, pain relief may be incomplete. However, unless told to do so by your healthcare provider, **never take extra methadone doses or other pain relievers**, as this could be harmful or fatal.
- If you forget to take your usual methadone dose on time, you can take it very soon thereafter. Otherwise, wait until it is time for the next dose and take only that; **do not** take extra methadone to make up for what was missed.
- To help avoid missing doses or taking extra ones, use a dosing chart or medication log to keep track of when you take each dose of methadone.
- If you are forgetful, have someone else give you each dose of methadone and keep a record of it.

- Do not take methadone with grapefruit or grapefruit juice. It can block the breakdown of methadone, causing a harmfully excessive amount to accumulate.

## Store methadone safely

- Methadone ***absolutely must be kept in a safe place*** where others - children or adults - cannot gain access to it. A single tablet of methadone could be harmful, or even fatal, in an individual who is not used to the medication.
- Do not keep methadone on kitchen counters, in bathroom cabinets, or other obvious places. If necessary, store methadone in a locked box or cabinet and in an out of the way location.
- Remember, persons you may least suspect, family members or visitors, might look for drugs like methadone to use for illegal purposes.
- Never share your methadone with anyone else, since it could do them great harm.

## What are methadone side effects to watch for?

- Alert your family members or carers of ***important warning signs*** to watch for that may indicate you are reacting badly to methadone and are in distress. If you experience any of the following, they should call for emergency help:
  - Trouble staying awake
  - Difficult or slow breathing
  - Loud or unusual snoring at night and difficulty being awakened
  - Fast heartbeat, unusual dizziness, or loss of consciousness (fainting)
- Methadone, like all other opioids, may cause constipation. Your healthcare provider or pharmacist can recommend approaches for preventing or treating this. Reducing the methadone dose will not help.

- Certain side effects, if they occur at all, usually become milder or go away with time, such as lightheaded feeling, nausea, stomach upset, or mild drowsiness. Possible others may be more long-lasting, including: itching, dry mouth, flushing, or increased sweating. Contact your healthcare provider if any of these continue or worsen.
- Uncommon side effects include confusion, mood changes (depression or agitation), shaking, blurred vision, or difficulty urinating. If you experience any of these, tell your healthcare provider.
- Allergic reactions to methadone - including rash, hives or swelling - are rarer but require prompt medication attention.
- You should refrain from driving and other activities requiring balance or focused concentration until the effects of methadone are known, typically a week or longer.

## Will you become dependent on or addicted to methadone?

- After awhile, methadone causes ***physical dependence***. That is, if you suddenly stop the medication you may experience uncomfortable withdrawal symptoms, such as diarrhoea, body aches, weakness, restlessness, anxiety, loss of appetite and other feelings. These may take several days to develop.
- This is not the same as ***addiction***, a disease involving craving for the drug, loss of control over taking it or compulsive use, and using it despite harm. Addictions to methadone in persons without a recent history or alcohol or drug problems are rare.
- If you ever want to stop taking methadone, do not so on your own. Gradually reducing the methadone dose as directed by your healthcare provider will help prevent uncomfortable withdrawal reactions.