

## Is it safe to take other medicines while on methadone?

Methadone may increase the effects of other medicines that make you sleepy or dizzy. You may need lower doses of other pain medicines. Other medicines may also change the effects of methadone. Your doctor will adjust doses as needed.

Tell your healthcare professionals what medicines you take, including any you buy in a pharmacy or shop, herbal remedies or recreational drugs.

## Can I drink alcohol when I'm taking methadone?

Taking alcohol with methadone can cause sleepiness. It is therefore recommended that you avoid taking alcohol when taking methadone. Talk to your doctor if you want to discuss this further

## Can I become addicted to methadone?

Addiction is not a problem when the right dose is taken for the right reason and reviewed appropriately. If you no longer need methadone, your palliative care specialist will support you to reduce it gradually. Do not stop taking it suddenly without medical advice.

Apart from pain control, methadone is used to help people who are withdrawing from illegal drugs. However, methadone is also a pain reliever and prescribed widely for pain relief by healthcare professionals across the world.

# Methadone in palliative care

## Information Leaflet for Patients

### What is methadone used for?

Methadone belongs to a group of medicines called strong opioids. It is used to treat moderate or severe pain that has been difficult to control, either on its own or with other pain relievers. It can also be used to treat cough or shortness of breath.

Only a palliative care specialist will start or adjust the dose of methadone.

### Notes



**This medicine is ONLY FOR YOU. Never give it to anyone else even if their symptoms appear to be the same as yours.**

**If you have any further questions about this medicine please speak to your palliative care team.**

## How do I take my methadone?

Methadone is taken by mouth, as an oral solution or tablets, or as an injection.

Oral methadone is usually taken once or twice a day.

If you are to take it twice a day, take your first dose in the morning when you wake up and then your evening dose about 12 hours later.

If using the oral solution, use an oral syringe to measure the right dose in ml. Your doctor, nurse or pharmacist will show you how to do this.

If prescribed methadone as an injection, a nurse will give this as an infusion over 24 hours using a syringe pump.

The dose and frequency will be decided by your palliative care specialist and adjusted based on your symptoms.

Always follow the instructions on the label.

If you find methadone is not working as well as expected, contact your doctor. **It is important that you do not take more methadone than advised by your palliative care specialist.**

## What if I miss a dose of regular methadone?

Take a dose as soon as you remember. Do not take a double dose to make up for the missed dose.

**It is important not to stop taking methadone suddenly without speaking to your palliative care team first.**

## How should I store methadone?

Store in a dry place, below 25°C and out of reach of children.

If no longer required, return any unused methadone to your community pharmacy.

## How do I get more methadone?

Contact your GP to arrange a prescription. Take this to your community pharmacy. Do not let your supply run out before requesting the prescriptions as it may take a few days for your pharmacy to order.

## What are the common side effects?

All medicines can cause side effects, though not everyone experiences them. They may include:

Side effect	What to do
Drowsiness	This may happen at the start of treatment or when the dose is increased. It should improve with time.  If this does not improve or is getting worse contact your palliative care team.
Sickness	This may occur when you first start methadone. Your doctor may give you some anti-sickness medicine for a few days to help.  If this does not improve or is getting worse contact your palliative care team.
Feelings of restlessness	Contact the palliative care team looking after you.
Confusion	
Bad dreams / hallucinations	

Do not stop taking your medicine suddenly if you have any concerns about possible side effects. Seek advice from your palliative care team.

## Can I drive when I'm taking methadone?

You are responsible for ensuring you are fit to drive. Northern Ireland law allows you to drive when taking medicines if your ability is not affected.

Do not drive or use machinery if:

- You have recently started taking methadone and don't know how it affects you
- The dose or frequency has changed recently
- You have taken alcohol along with methadone
- You feel drowsy or sleepy, or cannot concentrate.

Advice is available at NI Direct:

