

# Medication-Assisted Treatment: Methadone



## What Is Medication-Assisted Treatment?

Medication-assisted treatment (MAT) is the use of medication in combination with counseling and behavioral therapies to provide a whole person approach to the treatment of opioid use disorders (OUD). **Methadone** is one of the medications used in the delivery of medication-assisted treatment.

## What Is Methadone And How Does It Work?

Methadone is an FDA-approved medication that makes it easier for people to stop using drugs, such as heroin, morphine, codeine, oxycodone, and hydrocodone, without feeling sick.

Methadone, a long-acting opioid agonist, reduces opioid craving and withdrawal and dulls or blocks the effects of opioids. It is available in liquid, powder, and diskette forms. When taken as prescribed, methadone is safe and effective. Methadone helps individuals achieve and sustain recovery and reclaim active and meaningful lives.

## How Can A Person Receive Methadone?

By law, only a Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)-certified opioid treatment program (OTP) can dispense methadone for the treatment of OUD. Patients taking methadone to treat OUD must receive the medication under the supervision of a practitioner. After a period of stability (based on progress and proven, consistent compliance with the medication dosage), patients may be allowed to take methadone at home between program visits.

The length of time a person receives methadone treatment varies. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse publication, *Principles of Drug Addiction Treatment: A Research-Based Guide* (2012), the length of methadone treatment should be a minimum of 12 months. Some patients may require long-term maintenance. Patients must work with their MAT practitioner to gradually reduce their methadone dosage to prevent withdrawal.

- Medication-assisted treatment (MAT) is the use of medication in combination with counseling and behavioral therapies to treat opioid use disorder.
- Methadone is an MAT medicine that reduces opioid craving and withdrawal, and dulls or blocks the effects of opioids.
- Methadone medication is tailored for the individual patient and is safe and effective when taken as prescribed.
- Patients should never share methadone medication.
- Individuals should talk to their healthcare provider before stopping their medication and ask their prescriber about safely disposing of the medication.

## Methadone Safety

Methadone is safe and effective when taken as prescribed. Methadone medication is specifically tailored for the individual patient (doses are often adjusted and readjusted) and is never to be shared with or given to others. This is particularly important for patients who take methadone at home and are not required to take medication under direct supervision at an OTP.

Patients should share their complete health history with health providers to ensure the safe use of the medication. Some other medications may interact with methadone and cause heart conditions. Even after the effects of methadone wear off, the medication's active ingredients remain in the body for much longer. Unintentional overdose is possible if patients do not take methadone as prescribed.



Wheeler

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[www.ctclearinghouse.org](http://www.ctclearinghouse.org)

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## Connecticut Resources

CT Department of Mental  
Health and Addiction Services  
[www.ct.gov/DMHAS](http://www.ct.gov/DMHAS)

24/7 Access Line  
1.800.563.4086

## National Resources

Substance Abuse and Mental  
Health Services Administration  
[www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov)

Centers for Disease Control  
and Prevention  
[www.cdc.gov/pregnancy/opioids](http://www.cdc.gov/pregnancy/opioids)

The following tips can help achieve the best treatment results:

- Never use more than the amount prescribed, and always take at the times prescribed
- Prevent children and pets from accidental ingestion by storing it out of reach
- If a dose is missed, or if it feels like it's not working, do not take an extra dose of methadone
- Store methadone at room temperature and away from light
- Do not consume alcohol while taking methadone
- Do not share methadone with anyone even if they have similar symptoms or suffer from the same condition
- Be careful driving or operating machinery on methadone
- Dispose of unused methadone safely
- Call 911 if too much methadone is taken or if an overdose is suspected

### Common And Serious Side Effects Of Methadone

#### Common Side Effects of Methadone

- Restlessness
- Nausea or vomiting
- Slow breathing
- Itchy skin
- Heavy sweating
- Constipation
- Sexual problems

#### Serious Side Effects of Methadone

- Difficulty breathing
- Feeling faint/light-headed
- Chest pain
- Fast/pounding heartbeat
- Hives, rash
- Swelling of face, lips, tongue or throat
- Hallucinations/confusion

Side effects should be taken seriously, as some of them may indicate an emergency. Patients should stop taking methadone and contact a doctor or emergency services right away.

### Pregnant Or Breastfeeding Women And Methadone

Women who are pregnant or breastfeeding can safely take methadone. Comprehensive methadone maintenance treatment should include prenatal care to reduce the risks of complications during pregnancy and at birth. Undergoing methadone maintenance treatment while pregnant does not cause birth defects. Methadone's ability to prevent withdrawal symptoms helps pregnant women better manage their opioid use disorder while avoiding health risks to both mother and baby. Pregnant woman who experience withdrawal may be at risk of miscarriage or premature birth, as withdrawal can cause the uterus to contract.

It is possible that some babies may experience withdrawal, also known as neonatal abstinence syndrome (NAS), after birth. Symptoms may begin within minutes to hours after birth, with most symptoms appearing within 72 hours. It is possible for symptoms to appear as late as up to two weeks after birth. It is important to speak with a physician, as NAS is influenced by many factors.



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