

Medication Information Sheet



Methadone

brands: Methadose®, others

Medications are only ONE part of a successful treatment plan. They are appropriate when they provide benefit, improve function and have either no or mild, manageable side effects. Importantly, medications (even if natural) are chemical substances not expected in the body, and as such have side effects. Some of the side effects might be unknown. The use of medications/drugs for any purpose requires patient consent. This practice does NOT require a patient to use any medication.

Information & potential benefits

Schedule II opioids are pain relievers that work on specific opioid pain receptors in the body. Opioids are believed to be the most effective pain killing medications. **Methadone is more potent than morphine or oxycodone.** Alternatives include non-medication modalities, pain interventions and non-opioid medications. Schedule II opioids have the highest risk of abuse and addiction and the highest risk of fatal overdose. They cannot be refilled and cannot be called into a pharmacy. Unlike other opioids, methadone has activity at three different levels in the body, which may explain why it tends to cause less opioid tolerance and why it tends to provide better pain control. (1) Like other opioids, it works at the mu opioid receptor, (2) It also blocks the NMDA receptor which could reduce tolerance, and (3) It also inhibits the reuptake of both norepinephrine and serotonin like some of the newer antidepressants, which could explain its benefit in neuropathic pain. Although it has "three times the benefit" it also has "three times the risks."

Potential risks and side effects

Common and basic side effects include nausea, dizziness, lightheadedness, fatigue, sweating, mental clouding, constipation, itching, and sexual problems. You should let your practitioner know if you experience any of these. Constipation may need continued attention. Diet is important: eating fruits and vegetables & drinking plenty of fluids also can help. There is a risk of addiction with the use of controlled substances. The risk appears low unless there is a family or personal history of addiction to drugs or alcohol. However, there is no guarantee that you will not become addicted. Opioid pain medications increase the risk of asthma attacks or other lung problems in patients with lung disease such as asthma. All opioids are dangerous in persons with prostate problems, low blood pressure, head injury or increased intracranial pressure. Rare but serious side effects of opioid products include seizures, constipation requiring surgery, heart failure, and death. Methadone slowly accumulates in the body. Thus, there can be a delay of 1-2 weeks in side effects. Because the side effects of any given dose may not be clear for a week or two, the dose must be increased very slowly and cautiously. **Patients must not increase the dose on their own, not even 1 pill-not even 1 time, because of the significant risk of delayed toxicity and sudden death.** Also, there is evidence that methadone can affect the way the heart beats by increasing a part of the heart cycle called the QT. If the QT interval gets too long, the heart could stop suddenly. The exact doses and risk factors are not known, but a recent medical consensus opinion recommends a screening EKG for those patients who: take more than 200 mg/day, are on drugs known to interact with methadone (which are many), and who already have prolonged QT intervals. A screening EKG can help identify potential problems but in no way guarantees safety.

Dosing information

	MORNING	AFTERNOON	EVENING
Week 1	5mg		
Week 2	5mg		5mg
Week 3	5mg	5mg	5mg
Week 4	10mg	5mg	5mg
Week 5	10mg	5mg	10mg
Week 6	10mg	10mg	10mg

Do not increase each week unless the medication is well tolerated. Do not increase if it is already working in the lower dose. Do not ever take extra medication or increase faster.

Important information

Disclaimer: This is for informational purposes only. This does not replace the instructions you received from your provider, does not constitute initiation of medical treatment or establishment of a patient-physician relationship, does not constitute any form of recommendation, prescription or medical advice, and does not imply that the medication is appropriate or FDA approved for any condition. This information is not a complete listing of instructions, doses, uses or side effects. If this was prescribed to you, you must review this information with your pharmacist and prescriber before starting the medication. Any medication may interfere with the ability to drive, concentrate or operate machinery; patients must be responsible for their own behavior and should not engage in any dangerous activity if there is any question of impairment. All medications have side effects and drug interactions, some serious, some fatal. Let all of your practitioners and pharmacists know about every substance used. Alcohol, herbals or illegal drugs are not considered safe with these medications. Assume no medication is safe during pregnancy or while breast feeding. The medication may interfere with birth control. Almost any medication can cause sleepiness, insomnia, dizziness, confusion, hallucinations, anxiety, panic, constipation or diarrhea, headache, chest pain and nausea or vomiting, among others. Most medications should NOT be stopped suddenly because of the risk of withdrawal.