

The OSAZE Clinic

METHADONE LEAFLET:

What is Methadone?

Methadone is a synthetic drug, used in the treatment of people who have a physical dependence to opiates, thereby preventing the onset of opiate withdrawal symptoms such as runny eyes, sneezing/ runny nose, sweating, insomnia, stomach cramps, diarrhoea.

You will be prescribed a preparation in the strength of 1mg/1ml. Methadone, like heroin can also cause a physical dependence.

After taking methadone, it takes about 30 minutes to start working and thereby prevent opiate withdrawal. For some one starting treatment for the first time, it takes about 4-5 days to get a steady plasma level. As methadone is a long acting drug once a day dose is sufficient.

Getting Started:

Before any treatment is prescribed, a medical assessment is carried out, to ascertain current opioid use.

In most instances, patients are then started on a low dose of methadone ranging between 15-30ml (1mg/1ml) of methadone. The methadone dose is then gradually increased every few days, by 5-10ml, till they no longer have any physical opiate withdrawal symptoms and are maintained on a therapeutic dose range between 60-100ml of methadone.(1mg/1ml) in most cases. In certain patients, doses above 100ml may be prescribed.

Collection and Storage of Methadone:

Medication is usually collected from the chemist that the patient prefers, and will either be on a weekly, twice weekly or daily pick up basis. In some circumstances, they may be on observed consumption.

As methadone can be extremely dangerous to non-opiate users or children, it should be stored safely, preferably in a high cupboard with a lock on it. Additional safety measures include making sure the bottles have child safety top on it. Avoid keeping it in the fridge and keep it away from children.

Side effects and Potential Risks.

Methadone causes physical dependence and it should only be prescribed to those who are physically dependent on opioids i.e. Heroin, morphine, codeine etc. It is also used in treatment by cancer specialists for certain types of pain management.

As with all other drugs Methadone may cause some side effects, although this does not necessarily mean that you will experience them. The most common ones include constipation, nausea, vomiting, sweating, itchy skin, drowsiness others include dry mouth, miosis, and decreased libido.

Larger doses may produce respiratory depression and hypotension. Methadone must be used carefully with other sedating drugs i.e. alcohol, benzodiazepines (diazepam, nitrazepam, temazepam), as all these drugs affect a person's breathing, it can lead to an increased risk of an accidental overdose.

Advantages of going onto Methadone:

By starting treatment with methadone, there is no longer a physical need to continue taking illicit heroin, morphine or codeine. This improves quality of life significantly and gives people an opportunity to focus on other social issues that need to be addressed.

Once patients are stabilised on therapeutic dose of methadone, patients can decide about their future course of action. Patients who would like to come off their methadone can be helped by a gradual reduction of their methadone dose and eventually complete their detoxification. Those patients who would like to remain on the optimum dose of methadone will continue on the dose, thus minimising the risk of relapse.

Women and Methadone:

If you are on methadone or heroin you may not have regular periods.

You can still get pregnant, so it is important to use a suitable form of contraception. You may contact your GP or your family planning clinic for further information and advice.

If you become pregnant while being on methadone, inform your GP, midwife and your doctor prescribing you methadone. Your prescribing doctor will be able to counsel you about methadone and its effect on pregnancy and on the baby.

Coming off methadone immediately or a fast reduction is not recommended without discussion.

Methadone and Driving:

It is an offence to be in charge of a vehicle, if a person is unfit to drive through drink or drugs. The DVLA considers drug use, including the use of prescribed drugs, to be a disability in this context.

If you are on methadone, it is the patient's responsibility to inform the DVLA about their opioid dependence and their treatment with methadone.

When you inform the DVLA, they will write to us requesting further information. On receiving the information, DVLA then decides on a client's fitness to drive. The DVLA may request a medical examination.

Please contact DVLA directly for any driving related queries, whilst you are on methadone. The DVLA may be informed directly by us, if we have reasons to fear for your safety or the safety of others.

Travelling Abroad with Methadone:

With effect from 1st January 2008 persons travelling abroad (or visitors travelling to the UK) for longer than three months, or travellers carrying more than three months supply of medication will require a personal export or import licence as appropriate.

A licence is not required for travel duration that is less than three months.

A personal licence has no legal standing outside the UK and is intended to assist travellers passing through UK customs controls with their prescribed controlled drugs.

Travellers are advised to contact the embassy/Consulate/ high Commission of the country of destination (or any country through which they may be travelling) regarding the local policy on the importation of controlled drugs.

Controlled drugs should be

Carried in original packaging

Carried in hand luggage (BAA/Airline regulations permitting)

Carried with a valid personal import/export licence (if necessary as above)

Carried with a letter from the prescribing doctor confirming the carrier's name, destination, drug details/amounts, unless a personal licence is held.

Anyone outside their home country for longer than three months should register with a doctor in the country they are visiting for the purpose of receiving further prescriptions.

If you require a licence please download the application form from

<http://drugs.homeoffice.gov.uk/drugs-laws/licensing/personal/>

(A licence is not required for travel duration that are less than three months.)

Methadone and the Law:

Methadone is a class A drug. It is only legal to have it with a doctor's prescription. Illegal possession, giving it away or selling methadone is an offence.

Links:

Methadone alliance www.m-alliance.org.uk/

Methadone replacement for Heroin www.patient.co.uk

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