

## Using Methadone for Pain in Palliative Care

### What is methadone?

Methadone is an opioid (sometimes called narcotic) like morphine and codeine.

### Why use methadone for pain?

Methadone is used to help treat complex pain often related to nerve pain. It should only be used when pain control is needed all the time. It can also be used when other pain medicine is not working well. Sometimes methadone is used with other pain medications.

Methadone can be used for people with drug addictions, but this is very different than how it is used to treat pain. It is not common for people in palliative care to become addicted when they use opioids as prescribed to manage their pain.

### How do I take methadone?

Methadone, when taken by mouth, can be in tablet or liquid form. Liquid methadone can be swallowed or held under the tongue or in the cheek. Your doctor or nurse explains how to use it.

Methadone is usually taken 3 times a day. For *break through* pain or when extra pain medicine is needed, usually a different medicine is used.

How much methadone you take depends on what your doctor thinks you need. It might take weeks to find the best amount for you. Follow the doctor's instructions carefully.

You can take methadone with or without food.

### What are the common side effects of methadone?

- upset stomach (nausea)
- hard stools (constipation)
- throwing up (vomiting)
- dizziness
- feeling sleepy
- headache
- sweating a lot
- feeling tired or weak

Speak to your healthcare team about how to treat these side effects.

If you feel sleepy and/or dizzy, do not drive or work with machinery.

### **What if I take other medicine or drugs?**

Other medicines might interact with the methadone and cause **serious effects**.

Drinking alcohol or using cannabis or other drugs while taking methadone can make you feel sleepier.

Medicines, herbal medicines, or natural supplements you can buy without a prescription can interact with methadone.

**Tell your doctor and/or the pharmacist about all the medicines you are taking.**

They want to make sure they are safe for you to take methadone.

### **What happens if I miss a dose?**

Speak with your pharmacist, nurse, or doctor about the timing of your next dose. If you cannot reach them, call HealthLinkBC at 8-1-1 for advice.

**Do not take a double dose to make up for a missed methadone dose.**

### **What if I take too much?**

Take only the amount of methadone prescribed by your doctor. If you take too much methadone, you might feel sleepy, have a hard time staying awake, and/ or have slow breathing.

Contact your doctor **or** ask someone to take you to Emergency Department right away. It helps to always take the container with you, even if it is empty.

### **What if I want to stop taking methadone?**

If you want to stop taking methadone, ask your doctor. Your doctor will reduce the dose slowly to make sure your pain is controlled. This also avoids unwanted withdrawal symptoms (sweating, feeling sick, or stomach upset).

**Do not stop methadone suddenly.**

### **How do I store methadone?**

Store methadone at room temperature (unless told differently).

Keep all medicines where children and pets cannot see or reach them. You might need to lock them up.

Never share your medicine with others even if their symptoms seem the same as yours.

Always return all unused medicines to the pharmacy as soon as you no longer need the medicine.

**Have questions?  
Want more information?  
Contact your healthcare team.**