



How Much Methadone is “Enough”?

***A*s with other** medicines, such as antibiotics or insulin, it is essential to take an adequate amount of methadone for treatment success. Too much or too little can be a problem. But, just how much methadone each day is the right amount during methadone maintenance treatment (MMT) for opioid addiction?

This brochure provides important information to help you know how much methadone is “enough.”

Why is adequate methadone dose important?

An *adequate* daily dose of methadone offers very special advantages for people recovering from opioid addiction:

- It takes away hunger or craving for other opioid drugs, such as heroin or opioid-based pain medications.
- It doesn't make you feel “high” or drugged.
- It prevents uncomfortable withdrawal symptoms from one dose to the next.

In short, sufficient methadone taken each day allows you to lead a more normal and productive life, free of the compulsion to take illicit opioid drugs.

How much is “enough” ?

The best dose of any medicine is the amount that will produce an effective response for the desired period of time, while also allowing for a margin of safety. Methadone is no different, and it is important that persons in MMT receive sufficient doses.

When methadone was developed as a daily maintenance treatment for opioid addiction in the mid-1960s, researchers found that most people needed at least 80 to 120 milligrams each day to realize its full advantages. Some needed much more and some needed a bit less but, overall, doses in that range were effective.

However, there is no single methadone dose that is best for everyone. The “right” dose can vary from one person to another, with some needing many times more than others each day.

Why are dose requirements different?

People naturally differ in how they respond to methadone. Some digest and breakdown the drug – called *metabolism* – much more quickly and completely. Others may need a higher dose because their prior abuse of opioids was more severe and they need extra methadone to achieve stable functioning. Some persons have physical ailments or are taking other medicines that make methadone less effective, so more is needed to overcome this. Also, using illicit drugs, such as heroin or cocaine, or alcohol while in MMT can alter methadone’s effects, making it almost impossible to maintain an adequate level of methadone in the body, and can be harmful.

Do higher doses cause worse side effects?

Any medication can have undesirable side effects. Some, but certainly not all, people taking methadone may experience constipation, fatigue, aches and pains, increased perspiration, or other symptoms.

Most of these are minor nuisances and disappear as the body adjusts to an adequate methadone dose. Changes in dose to higher levels may bring back the symptoms temporarily, but they often can be treated and become less troublesome over time. Few persons have ever left an MMT program purely because of methadone side effects.

Does a higher dose create more dependence?

Some people worry that higher doses will make them “more addicted” and less able to eventually withdraw from methadone. According to research, the opposite is true. Persons taking adequate doses are more successful in MMT and better able to eventually achieve opioid abstinence, if they desire, than those receiving too

little methadone. However, the benefits of MMT continue only while a person remains in treatment. No matter what the methadone dose, relapse to opioid abuse is common in people who leave treatment or withdraw from methadone on their own.

What can you do?

It is important that you establish a trusting relationship with clinic staff. They need honest information from you to help determine the best methadone dose.

- **If your daily dose isn’t “holding” – that is, you feel drug cravings or withdrawal symptoms before the next dose – talk to clinic staff about an increase.**
- **Do not compare your dosing needs with others at the clinic. A higher or lower methadone dose is neither a badge of shame nor pride.**
- **It can take time to adjust to a higher dose, but let clinic staff know if you feel any side effects.**
- **Avoid illicit drugs or alcohol, as well as unauthorized herbal products or alternative medicines. These can work against methadone and make you feel ill.**
- **Never take extra doses of methadone on your own, since this can lead to harmful overdose.**

Remember, methadone is strong medicine and clinic staff are concerned with your safety. They will feel most comfortable providing dose adjustments for persons who are cooperative and follow clinic rules.

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For further information on addiction and recovery issues, visit the *Addiction Treatment Forum* website at www.atforum.com.

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