



What Is Success In MMT?

Achieving success in methadone maintenance treatment (MMT) requires hard work. And, recovery from opioid addiction via MMT is an ongoing journey, rather than a final destination.

There are many rewards, but also potential setbacks, on the road to successful recovery. This brochure describes some attainable benefits of MMT and certain pitfalls to avoid.

What are the immediate goals of MMT?

Soon after entering methadone maintenance treatment, *adequate* methadone dosing will accomplish three objectives:

1. Suppress uncomfortable opioid withdrawal symptoms.
2. Extinguish cravings for illicit “street opioids.”
3. Block effects of illicit opioids if any are taken.

It can take a number of days, or even weeks, to achieve these first goals and several methadone dose adjustments may be necessary along the way. Adequate methadone dosing sets the stage for continuing recovery.

However, the size of methadone dose – whether a high or low amount – is *not* a measure of success. Each patient’s needs are different when it comes to an adequate dose.

How does one get on the road to recovery?

The many changes necessary for addiction recovery have been described as a “lifestyle transplant.” People, places, and activities formerly associated with a life of opioid abuse need replacing.

This starts with a personal desire for recovery and becoming involved in a support network that encourages drug abstinence. These supports are

developed by active participation in the MMT program, improving family relationships and friendships, renewed commitments to work or school, and attending recovery group meetings.

For most patients, coexisting mental disorders – such as, depression or anxiety – also must be addressed. Better mental health promotes progress in MMT and reduces the chances of drug relapse.

Why is take-home methadone a measure of success?

Only patients who have demonstrated significant progress in recovery and responsible behaviors are allowed to take methadone home from the clinic for self-administration. So this is an important indicator of success.

U.S. federal regulations governing MMT programs require taking into account a number of factors before allowing take-home methadone:

- length of time in MMT;
- abstinence from addictive substances, including alcohol;
- regular clinic attendance and following clinic rules;
- avoidance of criminal activity;
- stability of the home environment and social relationships;
- assurance that methadone can be safely stored at home;
- whether the benefits of decreased clinic attendance outweigh any potential risks of methadone diversion.

These are all important measures of success in MMT. If any of them are lacking, it suggests that harder work on addiction recovery is needed.

What about lapses and relapses?

One ultimate goal of MMT is a life completely free of illicit drug and alcohol abuse. However, opioid addiction is a persistent (chronic) and relapsing *disease*, so setbacks might be expected.

During early recovery, some patients are tempted to sample substances of abuse, and brief lapses in sobriety are relatively common. A smaller number return to full-blown opioid abuse, which can be either devastating or, hopefully, only a temporary detour on the road to recovery.

It is important to remember that what matters most is not how hard you fall down but how quickly you get up and get going again in the right direction.

How long must MMT continue for success?

For many patients, methadone maintenance must continue indefinitely for ongoing recovery. However, this is akin to a diabetic's reliance on life-long insulin, or the need for a person with hypertension to take medicine every day.

Many medications, including methadone, often are necessary for more healthful and productive lives. Patients discontinuing MMT before they are ready, or those not pursuing an ongoing program of recovery after leaving, usually return to substance abuse and addiction.

*W*hat can you do?

You can help make your experience in MMT more successful by taking the following steps:

- **Be willing to make necessary lifestyle changes.**
- **Learn MMT clinic rules and follow them.**
- **Attend and participate actively in counseling sessions or therapy groups.**
- **Ask for help before minor difficulties become major problems.**
- **If you have a drug/alcohol lapse or relapse, get right back with the MMT program.**
- **Resist any temptation to leave MMT prematurely.**

MMT clinic staff are trained and willing to help you on your road to recovery – if you let them. Bring your questions or concerns to their attention.

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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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