



## Introducing the Road to Recovery

**O**ver the past 35 years, methadone has helped millions of people get off the endless roller coaster of opioid drug addiction. They improved their health, worked steady jobs or returned to school, gained happier family and social lives, and finally started feeling good about themselves.

If that sounds good to you, and is what you want, then you are ready to start on your own...

**road to recovery.**

### What is methadone?

Methadone is a painkilling medicine discovered in the 1940's by German scientists as a substitute for morphine. Soon, American companies brought methadone to the United States for use as a painkiller and, later, to help treat persons going through heroin withdrawal.

Methadone, heroin and morphine belong to a class of drugs called *opioids*. They all act in the brain on pain, mood and other emotions. However, methadone has some special qualities.

### What is Methadone Maintenance Treatment (MMT)?

In the early 1960s, two New York physicians, Vincent Dole and Marie Nyswander, discovered that if methadone is taken every day – called a “maintenance dose” – as part of a program offering supportive services, it is an effective medical treatment for opioid addiction.

Methadone works in several ways:

The right methadone maintenance dose doesn't make you feel “high” or “drugged,” like other opioids do, so you can lead a normal life.

Methadone's gradual, long-lasting effects – 24 hours or more – take away the hunger or craving for other opioid drugs.

Methadone is taken by mouth once a day, so you avoid using injection needles with their risks of diseases like hepatitis and HIV.

It helps you to live a healthier and better life, free of illegal drugs.

Many people say that methadone actually makes them feel “normal” for the first time in a long while. But, it's not a cure for addiction, and it is used as part of a recovery program that may include counseling, support group meetings, and other help provided by your clinic's staff.

Also, methadone is a treatment only for opioid drug addiction. Using other drugs – like alcohol, cocaine, or marijuana – will defeat your recovery.

## *How Safe* is methadone?

Ever since its invention, over 55 years ago, scientific studies have proved that methadone is just as safe as any other medicine prescribed by doctors. Methadone taken under a doctor's care causes no harm to *any* of your body organs and does not change your ability to think clearly.

Like any medicine, methadone might cause a reaction. Some, *but not all*, persons may experience minor side effects like sweating or constipation when they first begin treatment. Over time, these reactions usually disappear or become less bothersome on their own, or they might be eliminated with a small change in the methadone dose.

## *How Much* methadone?

The right methadone dose for you will depend on your overall health, and on other medications you might be taking. An adequate maintenance dose will keep you from having unpleasant withdrawal symptoms between doses. It will also eliminate craving for other opioid drugs or keep you from getting high if any are taken.

Your daily dose of methadone could be different from anyone else's at your clinic and it may be changed from time to time.

## *How Long* does treatment take?

There is no specific length of time in methadone maintenance treatment that is best for everyone. Generally, the longer you stay in the treatment program, the greater your chances for success.

Some persons take methadone for their entire lives, and gladly so. Others decide to try a completely drug-free approach once their lives get better, which can take some time.

Discuss this first with your clinic staff, so they can plan a gradual period of methadone reduction. Never cut back on your dose or stop taking methadone on your own, or you may experience withdrawal symptoms and drug craving, leading to relapse.

## *What's next?*

**To more fully understand what MMT can mean for you, talk to some winners; those people who have completely turned their lives around for the better as a result of methadone. Their stories will provide you with plenty of experience, strength and hope for a better future in recovery.**

**Further brochures in this series will help answer other questions you may have. And talk to your clinic staff – they are there to help you.**

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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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