



Methadone *Interactions* with *Other Drugs*

*M*ost persons in methadone maintenance treatment (MMT) programs are prescribed medications at one time or another. Some also take herbal remedies or drugstore over-the-counter products.

Certain drugs or products can react with methadone in undesirable ways. This brochure discusses those interactions and ways you can avoid them.

Is this a serious problem?

Methadone is a safe medication, as demonstrated during more than 35 years of use in MMT programs. Taken as prescribed, it does not harm any body organs or health.

However, like any strong medicine, methadone might interact with other medications, with street drugs or alcohol, and even with herbal remedies, vitamins, or other over-the-counter products. Such interactions are rarely life-threatening, but can result in your usual methadone dose becoming too much or too little. You might experience uncomfortable symptoms of methadone overmedication (drowsiness or itching) or opioid withdrawal (body aches, nausea, or drug craving).

What causes drug interactions?

Methadone is digested by enzymes, beginning in the gut and continuing in the liver. This process is called “metabolism.”

Some drugs or substances interact with these same enzymes to either speed up or slow down methadone metabolism. This unexpectedly decreases or increases the amount of methadone in your system.

On the other hand, methadone may affect metabolism of another medication you are prescribed. The result can be side effects caused by accumulation of the other medicine in your body, or a lack of desired effect due to the drug being metabolized too rapidly.

The more medications or other substances in the mix, the more potential there is for interactions. To control for this, your doctor needs to know of every health product and drug, in addition to methadone, that you are taking.

Which drugs can cause problems?

Certain drugs used to treat psychiatric disorders (such as depression), seizures, tuberculosis, other infections, or other illness may interact with methadone. But, they affect methadone in different ways; either increasing or decreasing methadone in your body.

For example, cocaine abuse or chronic use of alcohol can make the usual methadone dose feel too weak, possibly causing withdrawal symptoms. So can some, but not all, medications used to treat seizures, bipolar disorder, or problems sleeping. Drugstore items like St. Johns wort or large amounts of vitamin C also may decrease methadone levels.

In the other direction, certain medications for treating infection, depression, anxiety, or stomach disorders might make your methadone dose feel uncomfortably strong. Alternate medicines can be prescribed by clinic medical staff that will avoid this problem.

Many drugs used in treating HIV/AIDS also can interact to either increase or decrease levels of methadone. This is complicated by multiple medications usually being prescribed together, making it difficult to predict interactions in advance. So, close monitoring by your doctor is usually necessary.

Should certain drugs be avoided?

Some medications should never be used with methadone, since they can cause sudden and severe opioid withdrawal symptoms. These include naltrexone, nalmefene, or naloxone, which completely block methadone from working.

Also, certain painkilling medicines fight against methadone, causing withdrawal symptoms. Those to avoid include: buprenorphine (Buprenex®), butorphanol (Stadol®), dezocine (Dalgan®), nalbuphine (Nubain®), pentazocine (Talwin®), and tramadol (Ultram®).

What can your doctor do?

There are several ways your doctor can help. Your methadone dose may need to be increased or

lowered, at least temporarily, while you are taking an interacting medication.

In some cases, the other medication can be changed or the dose adjusted so it will not affect methadone. Your doctor may advise you to stop taking certain herbal supplements, vitamins, or even some foods while on a medication.

What can you do?

Methadone will not be affected by most medications or other substances you take. However, there are some things you can do to prevent drug interactions and unpleasant side effects from occurring:

- **Inform your doctors (including the dentist) of all drugs (prescription and nonprescription), herbal supplements, vitamins, and over-the-counter products that you are taking.**
- **Whenever you are prescribed a medicine, ask if it will be safe to take with methadone.**
- **Avoid all illicit drugs and alcohol, which can be dangerous if combined with methadone and/or other medications.**
- **Always take medications exactly as prescribed, such as at a specific time of day. If you miss a dose, call your doctor or pharmacist to ask what you should do.**
- **If you experience any unpleasant symptoms after taking a medicine or health product, call your clinic immediately. Never treat the symptoms, stop a medication, or change the dose on your own.**

Remember, if at any time your methadone dose suddenly doesn't feel right, it may not be right. Talk to your MMT clinic medical staff about this as soon as possible.

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