

METHADONE

Brand names Eptadone, Methadose, Metharose, Physeptone, Synastone

Used in the following combined preparations None

GENERAL INFORMATION

Methadone is a synthetic drug belonging to the opioid analgesic group. It is used in the control of severe pain, and as a cough suppressant in terminal illness, but it is more widely used to replace morphine or heroin in the treatment of dependence. For this, methadone can be given once daily to

prevent withdrawal symptoms. In some cases, dosage can be reduced until the drug is no longer needed.

Tolerance to methadone is marked. Although the initial dose for a person not used to opioids is very low, the dose needed by someone who is dependent could be fatal for a non-user.

QUICK REFERENCE

Drug group Opioid analgesic (p.37)

Overdose danger rating High

Dependence rating High

Prescription needed Yes

Available as generic Yes

INFORMATION FOR USERS

Your drug prescription is tailored for you. Do not alter dosage without checking with your doctor.

How taken/used



Tablets, liquid, injection.

Frequency and timing of doses

Pain 3–4 x daily; 2 x daily (prolonged use).

Cough 4–6 x daily (starting dose); 2 x daily (prolonged use).

Opioid addiction Once daily.

Adult dosage range

Pain 5–10mg per dose initially, adjusted according to response.

Cough 1–2mg per dose.

Opioid addiction 10–20mg (starting dose); 40–60mg daily (maintenance dose).

Onset of effect

15–60 minutes.

Duration of action

36–48 hours.

Diet advice

None.

Storage

Keep in original container at room temperature out of the reach of children. Protect injections and liquids from light.

Missed dose

Take as soon as you remember and return to your normal dosing schedule as soon as possible. If you missed the dose because it caused you to vomit, or if you cannot swallow, consult your doctor.

Stopping the drug

If the reason for taking methadone no longer exists, the drug can be slowly reduced and safely stopped. Discuss with your doctor.

OVERDOSE ACTION



Seek immediate medical advice in all cases. Take emergency action if symptoms such as slow or irregular breathing, severe drowsiness, or loss of consciousness occur.

See **Drug poisoning emergency guide (p.510)**.

SPECIAL PRECAUTIONS

Be sure to tell your doctor if:

- You have heart or circulatory problems.
- You have liver or kidney problems.
- You have lung problems such as asthma or bronchitis.
- You have thyroid disease.
- You have a history of epileptic seizures.
- You have a phaeochromocytoma (a type of adrenal gland tumour).
- You have problems with alcohol abuse.
- You are taking other medicines.



Pregnancy

Not prescribed in pregnancy if possible. May cause breathing difficulties in the newborn baby. Discuss with your doctor.



Breast-feeding

Safety not established. The drug passes into breast milk and may affect the baby adversely. Discuss with your doctor.



Infants and children

Not recommended.



Over 60

Reduced dose necessary.



Driving and hazardous work

Your underlying condition may make such activities inadvisable. Discuss with your doctor.



Alcohol

Avoid. Alcohol increases the sedative effects of the drug and may depress breathing.

POSSIBLE ADVERSE EFFECTS

Drowsiness and nausea are the most common side effects of methadone, but these diminish

as the body adapts. Constipation is also common and may be longer lasting.

Symptom/effect	Frequency		Discuss with doctor		Stop taking drug now	Call doctor now
	Common	Rare	Only if severe	In all cases		
Nausea/vomiting	●		●			
Drowsiness	●		●			
Constipation	●		●			
Dizziness/confusion	●			●		
Loss of consciousness		●		●	●	●
Slow, difficult breathing		●		●	●	●

INTERACTIONS

Phenytoin, carbamazepine, rifampicin, and ritonavir may reduce the effects of methadone.

Monoamine oxidase inhibitors (MAOIs) and selegiline Taken with methadone, these drugs may produce a dangerous rise or fall in blood pressure.

Erythromycin, clarithromycin, fluconazole, cimetidine, and ranitidine may increase the effects of methadone.

Sedatives The effects of all drugs that have a sedative effect on the central nervous system are likely to be increased by methadone.

PROLONGED USE

Treatment with methadone is always closely monitored. If the drug is being taken long-term, the dose must be carefully reduced before the drug is stopped.