

METHADONE



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Methadone is a controlled drug and can be prescribed as an opiate replacement therapy. Methadone acts as a substitute for heroin and other opiates. The aim is to allow users to give up heroin without experiencing severe withdrawal symptoms.

There are advantages to taking methadone. It is long-acting and keeps the person stable and can reduce the harms associated with heroin use. The risk of contracting blood borne viruses such as HIV and hepatitis is reduced. This is called harm reduction and can help people stabilise and improve their lives, particularly if they engage in counselling or avail of supports such as Narcotics Anonymous (NA).

People availing of methadone therapy commence treatment in a clinic to stabilise their drug use. They then transfer to an outside GP who is qualified to prescribe methadone. It is initially dispensed on a daily basis and supervised in a pharmacy. Clients may get take-home doses when they stop using drugs and become stable. Methadone is both legal and free.

Some clients choose to detox off methadone. This should be done at the client's pace and under medical supervision in order to be successful. Methadone maintenance is often long term and may be a more realistic option for some people in order to maintain stability in their lives.

Methadone is a safe effective drug when used correctly, however, it can have side effects. These can include constipation, itching, sweating, nausea, decreased sex drive, tooth decay, and various other side effects. It is recommended that the individual discuss these symptoms with the prescribing doctor. Methadone interacts with other drugs and alcohol and should only be taken as prescribed. There is an increased risk of overdose which can prove fatal when a combination of these drugs are taken. Like many other drugs, methadone can be abused and can lead to dependency. It is important that a person's GP is aware that methadone is being taken.

Methadone should always be stored safely and out of reach of children. A small amount of methadone could kill a child or an adult. Pregnant women using heroin should seek immediate medical advice. Currently methadone is the preferred safer option for pregnant women.



Refer to Information on Support Services section or www.supportme.ie for details on supports available