

Methadone

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Everyone Makes a Mark

What is Methadone?

Methadone is a synthetic opioid commonly used for the treatment of opioid dependence such as heroin, as well as for chronic pain management.

How is Methadone Misused?

Due to the fact that methadone is used as an effective replacement treatment for opiate dependence, many clinicians are hesitant to categorize it as a drug with potential for misuse and dependence. Recent studies however have demonstrated that methadone programs and clinics are slowly beginning to recognize the growing problem of methadone misuse. A number of methadone clinics have already taken the first step and defined substance misuse as 'the use of any substance by a patient undergoing treatment for substance dependence, for a purpose that is strictly non-medical'. Recent studies have found that methadone is ranked fourth out of all analgesics (painkillers) for risk of abuse.

How Prevalent is Methadone Misuse?

It is very hard to determine this. What we do know is that the mean age of onset for methadone misuse is 26 years of age- only a few years over the mean age of onset for heroin misuse which is 20 years of age.

What are the Consequences of Methadone Misuse?

Methadone misuse is becoming an increasingly growing problem due to the assumption that prescribed analgesics (painkillers) such as methadone are safer to use than illicit ones such as heroin.

Some physical side effects to the methadone maintenance program are sweating, dizziness, slurred speech, confusion, blurred vision, nervousness/malaise, depression, fatigue and/or weakness, dry mouth, hot flushes, chills, diarrhea, low libido, ringing in the ears, and loss of appetite.

However, it must be noted that when used chronically and at increasing doses, methadone can cause:

- Sedation
- Respiratory depression (to the point of respiratory arrest)
- Lack of energy
- Reduced sex drive
- Regular constipation
- Heart abnormalities
- Death

How Does Methadone Treat Opiate Dependence?

Methadone is longer-acting in the body than other opiates. In other words, smaller dosages of methadone at longer intervals are sufficient to avoid withdrawal symptoms and craving for opiates such as heroin, oxycodone and codeine.

How many people are enrolled in methadone maintenance treatment?

In Ontario alone, about 30,000 people are being treated for opiate addiction with the methadone maintenance therapy, and this number has increased from previous years.

Test your Knowledge of Methadone!

When you are finished, check your answers at the end of the quiz.

- a) True or False: Methadone use can lead to dependence
- b) True or False: Methadone is a naturally produced substance
- c) True or False: Like other analgesics, misuse of methadone can lead to respiratory depression to the point of death
- d) True or False: Clinicians have found a definitive treatment for methadone misuse
- e) True or False: Methadone is often misused on its own

Answers:

a- True, b-False, C-True, d- False, e-False