

HOW TO MANAGE METHADONE'S

SIDE EFFECTS?

What is methadone ?

Methadone is a synthetic opiate. At CRAN, it is used as a treatment for people who are dependent on heroin or other narcotics. In its pure state, methadone is a powder. The liquid you drink is mixed with juice to soften the bitter taste of methadone and to prevent its being injected.

The most common side effects are : sleepiness, constipation, sexual dysfunction, sweating, weight gain, stopped menstruation, apathy and insomnia. These effects are not always directly related to methadone as many other factors can cause similar problems. Methadone is habit forming. Dependence has occurred when we cannot remain abstinent from a substance without suffering physical or psychological pain.

What can you do :

- If you want to wear off of methadone, it's important to understand that you must reduce your dose gradually (often over many months) to reduce withdrawal symptoms.

METHADONE'S SIDE-EFFECTS

Somnolence is a strong desire to fall asleep. It is a sign of intoxication. At the beginning of your methadone treatment you may be slightly sleepy. At the proper dose, this effect should not cause a problem in your daily life.

What you can do :

- Take a short nap (15 minutes maximum) at the beginning of the afternoon – you'll feel better.
- If your sleepiness persists and affects your daily life (work, school) it would be wise to speak to one of CRAN's health professionals.

⚠️ Avoid activities that require you to be highly alert – such as driving a car.

⚠️ Put your cigarette out if you feel sleepy.

Constipation is one of the most common side effects. It is the reduction of intestinal movements. It is accompanied by hard and dry bowel movements that are difficult to pass.

What can you do :

- Eat foods rich in fiber (fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts, lentils and peas).
- Exercise. Rapid walks and exercises that strengthen the abdominals can help get things moving.
- Keep well hydrated. It's recommended to drink 1 ½ - 2 liters of water a day. Some even suggest a glass of hot water after each meal.
- Go to the bathroom as soon as you feel the urge. When you ignore your "Signals", they tend to get weaker.
- Reassure yourself by remembering that some people go 3 times a day, and others only

twice a week – and both are considered regular.

If a laxative is indicated, be careful of the following :

- Take it as prescribed and at the prescribed dosage.
- Be sure you are knowledgeable about your laxative's side-effects.

⚠️ Beware of laxative overuse. It leads to more constipation.

Sexual Dysfunction is an unsatisfying sexual response. This can happen both to men and women. For women who take methadone, lower or absence of sex drive or inability to achieve orgasm can occur. Men may have difficulties achieving or maintaining an erection, difficulty or inability to ejaculate, and/or lower or absent sex drive.

What you can do :

- Identify the problem. Ask yourself the following questions: Do you feel like having sexual relations? Is there disagreement or stress about this in your couple?
- Know that your sexual life can also be influenced by your past experiences.
- Once you've identified a problem, discuss it with your partner and then speak to one of the health professionals at CRAN.
- Be aware that CRAN offers the services of a sexologist.

Amenorrhea is the absence of menstrual flow.

What you can do :

- Speak to one of the health professionals at CRAN they can offer reassuring information.

⚠️ Not having periods doesn't mean you can't get pregnant – you can. So you must continue to use contraception.

Perspiration is the natural or stimulated production of sweat on the skin.

What you can do :

- By cleansing pads (Ponds, Olay, Noxema, Clean & Clear) that you can use to wash your face and refresh yourself.
- Take a shower or a bath at least once a day or twice a day in the heat. Wash your hair often. Sweat is mostly made up of water, but it also contains mineral salts and uric acid which are waste products your body eliminates. Accumulation of sweat on your skin and clothes leads eventually to a bad odor, and that's why it's important to be sure and launder your clothes.
- Drink lots of water to avoid dehydration
- If sweating becomes enough of a problem to affect your body image or self esteem, don't delay – speak to a health professional at CRAN*.

Apathy describes the behavior of someone who is indifferent about their feelings and desires. It describes an absence of reaction to psychological or physical lack of stimulation.

What you can do :

- Pay attention to the comments of your friends and family concerning your interest in activities and your reactions.
- If you're worried about this or you suspect you may have this problem, speak to one of CRAN's health professionals.

Weight Gain : methadone may cause weight gain in order to control your weight here's what you can do :

- Exercises. Physical activity helps burn calories and helps your body avoid storing calories as fat. It's recommended to exercise for one hour, three times a week.
- It's recommended to eat three meals a day, or 5-6 mini-meals per day.
- Reduce your calories. To do this, you should avoid foods rich in fat (fries, hamburgers, chips, etc.) and sugar (donuts, pastries, chocolat, brownies, cake, ice cream...)
- Improve your eating habits : stop when you feel satisfied and chew your food fully before swallowing.

Insomnia is difficulty sleeping. It's when you're not able to sleep during your regular sleeping hours. This effect is relatively rare. Actually, insomnia is likely more related to a long history of heroin or opiate use, and not methadone per se.

What you can do :

- Establish a calming routine that you can repeat each night at bedtime. For example, take a bath or shower, read or listen to music in order to prepare your body for sleep.

- Be active during the day. Activity and exercise increase the odds that you'll sleep uninterrupted through the night.
- Practice relaxation techniques such as deep abdominal breathing, massage, meditation, aromatherapy and calming visualization.
- Create a healthy sleep environment : choose calming colors for your bedroom (blue, green, lilac) ensure that the temperature is comfortable. Avoid having a television or computer in the bedroom; these are stimulants.
- Avoid coffee, tea, and soft drinks containing caffeine before bedtime. Instead, have a glass of warm mild or a tisane before turning in.
- Avoid alcohol.

****We encourage you to speak to a health professional at CRAN (doctor/nurse/counsellor) or your pharmacist if any of these side-effects are of concern to you, or you would like to have more information.***



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