

Methadone and Buprenorphine

Methadone and buprenorphine can be prescribed by a doctor as a substitute for heroin or other opiates (drugs related to opium). They can help overcome an addiction to opiates and a drug-dependent lifestyle.

Methadone

Methadone is a synthetic opioid that does not give the same pleasurable 'high' as heroin. It can be used in place of heroin (and other opiates) to reduce cravings and withdrawal symptoms, while the addicted person works toward overcoming their drug-dependent lifestyle.

Methadone is taken as a once-daily oral dose of solution or syrup.

Buprenorphine

Buprenorphine is a morphine derivative that has a milder opioid effect than morphine or methadone. It can be used in place of heroin (and other opiates) to reduce cravings and withdrawal symptoms. Unlike methadone,

buprenorphine actually prevents the pleasurable 'high' from heroin, so a person on regular buprenorphine is less likely to use heroin as well.

Buprenorphine is usually taken in a single dose once every one to three days, as a sublingual tablet that dissolves under the tongue. The tablet is given crushed to reduce its dissolving time and to reduce potential for misuse.

Drug treatment programs

Only approved doctors can admit someone to a methadone or buprenorphine program and prescribe these drugs. The 'Alcohol and Drug Service' or the 'user group' in your state or territory can help you to make contact with an approved doctor or clinic.

These drugs are more helpful if they are part of a treatment program including a supportive network, counselling and lifestyle changes. Regular contact with a specialist counsellor can help you through difficult issues, so it is important to find a counsellor who is right for you.

There are two types of programs:

- **Maintenance** (long-term) program – allows you to stay on methadone or buprenorphine indefinitely. This legal, supervised drug use is safer than illicit drug use and helps improve your overall well being and your control of your life. You can plan with your doctor to reduce the drug dose slowly when you are ready
- **Withdrawal** (short-term) detoxification program – aims to help you get completely off drugs quickly and usually lasts 5–14 days.

Benefits of methadone and buprenorphine:

The correct dose will:

- Be of guaranteed quality
- Help you to control your heroin use
- Stop you hanging out for heroin
- Last longer in the body than heroin
- Make drug withdrawal more comfortable
- Avoid health problems and risks related to injecting drugs.

Unwanted effects

It takes several days for methadone or buprenorphine to reach full effect,

so the first days or weeks of dosage adjustment can be uncomfortable. During this time it is very important not to use any other drugs or alcohol, as this increases the risk of overdose.

Some uncomfortable symptoms may be side effects of the methadone or buprenorphine. For example:

- Drowsiness
- Sweating
- Aches and pains
- Dry Mouth
- Nausea, vomiting, loss of appetite.

If the methadone or buprenorphine dose is too high or too low, uncomfortable symptoms are more likely. It is important to visit your doctor regularly to get the dose right.

Methadone/buprenorphine dispensing services

- 'Alcohol and Drug Service' clinics ('methadone clinics') and approved pharmacies can dispense methadone and buprenorphine. They must follow the doctor's prescribed dosing plan.
- A client usually starts treatment at a clinic and may transfer to a local pharmacy when stable.
- The clinic nurse or pharmacist must watch each client take their dose.
- 'Clinic transfers' or 'take away' doses can usually be arranged if needed – e.g., for work or travel. Always allow plenty of time for this to be arranged. Take away doses must not be stored in the fridge and must be kept away from children.

Self care

- Do not use other drugs (heroin, benzos, alcohol) while you are on methadone or buprenorphine, as this increases the risk of overdose.
- Some medicines for epilepsy and other illnesses can interact with methadone and buprenorphine. Ask your doctor or pharmacist.
- If you want to stop using methadone or buprenorphine, discuss it with your doctor or counsellor first.
- Do not give your dose or takeaways to anyone else.
- Do not inject methadone or buprenorphine.
- Tell any doctor or dentist treating you that you are on the drug program.
- Clean and check your teeth regularly, as opiates can increase tooth decay. Visit a dentist regularly.
- Exercise at a moderate level for at least 30 minutes on all or most days of the week.
- Get plenty of sleep and relaxation. Learn some relaxation techniques.
- Eat regular, healthy meals including plenty of fruit, vegetables and grains. Limit foods high in fat, sugar or salt.
- Drink enough water every day to satisfy your thirst and to keep your urine 'light-coloured' (unless a doctor advises otherwise).

Important

Consult a doctor or pharmacist if you:

- Can't sleep due to illness, pain or discomfort
- Wake up coughing, wheezing or unable to breathe
- Snore, especially if you wake yourself or others
- Have been taking sleeping tablets regularly for more than four weeks
- Continue to be tired during the day.

Pregnancy and breastfeeding

If you are pregnant, planning to become pregnant or are breastfeeding, discuss treatment options with your doctor. All states have specialist ante and post natal services.

For more information

Alcohol and Drug Information Services (ADIS)

	Australia-wide	State-wide
NSW	(02) 9361 8000	1800 422 599
QLD	(07) 3837 5989	1800 177 833
WA	(08) 9442 5000	1800 198 024
NT	(08) 89228399	1800 131 350
SA	(08) 83638618	1300 131 340
TAS		1800 811 994
VIC	1800 888 236	
ACT	(02) 6207 9977	

Australian Drug Foundation Drug Info Clearinghouse

Counselling phone: 1800 888 236
DrugInfo phone: 1300 85 85 84
Website: www.druginfo.adf.org.au.

Australian Injecting and Illicit Drug Users League (AIVL)

Phone: (02) 6279 1600
Website: www.aivl.org.au

Ambulance service

Phone: 000 or if using a mobile phone out of range dial 112

Healthdirect Australia

Phone: 1800 022 222
Website: www.healthinsite.gov.au

Consumer Medicine Information (CMI)

Your pharmacist can advise on CMI leaflets.

National Prescribing Service (NPS) Medicines Information

Phone: 1300 MEDICINE (1300 633 424)
Website: www.nps.org.au

The Poisons Information Centre

In case of poisoning phone 13 11 26 from anywhere in Australia.

Pharmacists are medicines experts. Ask a pharmacist for advice when choosing a medicine.

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Your Self Care Pharmacy: