

## Methadone – medicine for pain relief

### Why is my child being prescribed methadone?

Methadone is a synthetic morphine-like medicine, but very different to other morphine-like medicines, used for severe pain. Methadone should be taken for pain when prescribed under the direction of the Consultant in Paediatric Palliative Medicine at The Royal Marsden. It is prescribed when:

- Pain is not relieved by other morphine or morphine-like medicines
- Specialist medical support is available.

### How does methadone work?

- Methadone works by changing the way the brain and nerve pathways in the body respond to pain
- A dose of methadone should start to relieve pain within 30 minutes and can last up to four hours (short-term effect)
- Methadone can continue to relieve pain for up to 96 hours or four days (long-term effect), as it stays in the body's tissues
- Your child's pain is complex so it may take up to five days to get optimal pain relief once methadone has been started.

### How will my child take methadone?

Methadone is available in tablet, liquid or injection form. Your healthcare team will be in close contact with you about the prescribed dose. You should **only administer what is prescribed**.

### What special precautions should I follow?

Methadone can be a drug of misuse and you should keep it safe at all times. Keep a written note of how much methadone has been used. Methadone should be stored at room temperature away from moisture and heat.

### What special dietary precautions should I follow?

Alcohol is not recommended when taking methadone as severe side effects can occur when alcohol is combined with methadone.



## What side effects might my child experience when taking methadone?

- Constipation
- Disorientation
- Dizziness
- Nausea and vomiting
- Muscle twitches

Methadone may cause dizziness if your child gets up too quickly from lying down. To avoid this, they should get out of bed slowly, resting their feet on the floor for a few minutes before standing up.

## What if my child starts vomiting?

If your child vomits within 30 minutes of taking their methadone dose, it may be repeated but should be discussed with your symptom care team at The Royal Marsden. It is important to have anti-sickness medicine at home.

## What should I do if I forget a dose?

Give your child the methadone as soon as you remember. If it is almost time for the next dose, **skip the missed dose** and wait until the next regularly planned dose. Do not increase the dose to compensate. **Do not stop** giving methadone suddenly, or your child could have unpleasant withdrawal symptoms such as:

- Restlessness
- Muscle pain
- Enlarged pupils (of eyes)
- Watery eyes
- Sweating and shivers
- Runny nose
- Yawning

## What are the effects of 'too much' methadone?

Symptoms of taking too much methadone and a build-up effect may include:

- Extreme drowsiness
- Hypothermia (low temperature)
- Weak muscles
- Shallow or slow breathing leading to coma
- Confusion
- Small pupils (of eyes)
- Fainting
- Cool skin to the touch with blue fingernails and lips

## What other information should I know?

Inform the symptom care team if your child is taking complementary medicine and/or over-the-counter medicines before starting methadone.

Methadone medicine and morphine medicine, for example immediate release liquid oramorph or sevredol tablets, may still need to be taken for breakthrough pain. Your specialist healthcare team will advise you.



## Contact details

If you have any questions about this information, please contact

**The Children and Young People's Oncology Outreach and symptom care Nurse Specialist (CYPOONS) team** at The Royal Marsden:

Tel: 020 8661 3625 (Monday to Friday 9am - 5pm)

Evenings, nights, weekends and all bank holidays, please call The Royal Marsden switchboard

Tel: 020 8642 6011 and speak to the operator and ask for the **PATCH service**.

