

Methadone – medicine for pain relief

Why is my child prescribed methadone?

Methadone is a synthetic morphine-like medicine, used for severe pain. 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 responds to pain
- A dose of methadone should start to relieve pain within 30 minutes. It can last up to four hours (short-term effect)
- Methadone can go on relieving pain for up to four days (long-term effect).
- Your child's pain is complex. It may take up to five days to get the best pain relief.

How will my child take methadone?

Methadone is prescribed as tablets, liquid and/or as an injection. Give only what is prescribed.

What special precautions should I follow?

Methadone should be always kept safe and stored at room temperature. Keep note of how much Methadone has been given.

Alcohol is not advised when also taking methadone as serious side effects can occur.

What side effects might my child experience when taking methadone?

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

Methadone may cause dizziness if your child gets up too quickly from lying down. They should get out of bed slowly and take time resting before standing up.

What if my child starts vomiting?

If your child vomits within 30 minutes of taking their methadone, it may need to be repeated but you should discuss this with your health care team first. It is important to have medicines at home for nausea and vomiting.



What should I do if I forget a dose?

Give your child the methadone as soon as you remember. If it is near the time for the next planned dose, **skip the missed dose** and keep to the planned dose. Do not increase the dose to make up.

Do not stop giving methadone suddenly, as your child may 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
- 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 else should I know?

Let the health care team see if your child is taking any medicines you bought from the pharmacy when starting methadone.

Methadone and morphine medicines will still be prescribed for breakthrough pain. Your healthcare team will advise you.

Contact details

If you have any questions, please contact:

The Royal Marsden Children and Young People's Outreach and Symptom Care

Nurse Specialists (CYPONS).

Tel: 020 8661 3625

(Monday to Friday, 9am - 5pm)

Out of hours (evenings and weekends)

Tel: 020 8642 6011

Follow the electronic message to The Royal Marsden switchboard and ask for the PATCH team.

