



Coming off Methadone: What can I expect?



If you are considering coming off Methadone you may be concerned about what it will be like.

The character and severity of withdrawal symptoms that appear when you come off methadone depend on many factors, specifically:

How slowly you taper, your physical and emotional health, your personality and your expectations.

There is good evidence that the more prepared you are, the less you fear the detox and the more positively you feel about it, the easier your detox will be. Therefore it is important to know what is likely to occur during your detox and to plan for it.

The taper process:

If you stop taking methadone all at once after being on maintenance treatment, symptoms of withdrawal will appear 24-48 hours after the last dose and increase in intensity for six days.

They then begin to subside and most major symptoms are minimal by the 14th day.

However, general discomfort, loss of appetite and insomnia may persist for as long as six months and some people experience them for longer.

These symptoms can be reduced and some eliminated, by withdrawing according to a slow, deliberate dose decrease. The longer the taper, the fewer symptoms you are likely to get and the more manageable they are likely to be. There is good evidence that a 6 month taper for example, has a much higher success rate than a 21 day taper for most people, so take your time

The symptoms of withdrawal from methadone include:

- Insomnia
- Anxiety
- Hypertension
- Irritability
- Chills
- Excessive perspiration
- 'Runny' nose and eyes
- Enlarged pupils
- Sore joints
- Sore muscles
- Aching joints
- Muscle spasms
- Abdominal cramps
- Nausea
- Diarrhoea
- Overall malaise.

People also report heightened sensitivity and the return of feelings and memories that they may not have had for a very long time

For information about the support available to you during your detox talk to your case manager and the MMT recovery practitioner and have a look at the client information sheet called “Thinking of coming off Methadone?”

Are there risks in a methadone taper?

The biggest complication in a methadone detox is return to drug use. Most opiate overdose deaths occur in people who have just withdrawn or detoxed. Because withdrawal reduces your tolerance to the drug, those who have just gone through withdrawal can overdose on a much smaller dose than they used to take.



What should I do when I complete my taper?

Longer-term treatment is recommended for most people following a taper. This can include self-help groups and peer support groups, counseling, a combination of Naltrexone and counseling, intensive day programs or residential treatment. **People who don't engage in some kind of after care or have something they can engage with such as work or study are much more likely to relapse than those who do.**

Talk to your case manager or the recovery practitioner about support and options.

