Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Methadone

This information from UpToDate® Lexidrug™ explains what you need to know about this medication, including what it's used for, how to take it, its side effects, and when to call your healthcare provider.

Brand Names: US

Diskets; Methadone HCl Intensol; Methadose; Methadose Sugar-Free

Brand Names: Canada

APO-Methadone; JAMP Methadone; Metadol; Metadol-D; Methadose; ODAN-Methadone; ODAN-Methadone Dye Free; PMS-Methadone Hydrochloride

Warning

For all uses of this drug:

- This is an opioid drug. Opioid drugs can put you at risk for drug use disorder. Misuse or abuse of this drug can lead to overdose and death. You will be watched closely while taking this drug.
- Severe breathing problems may happen with this

drug. The risk is highest when you first start taking this drug or any time your dose is raised. These breathing problems can be deadly. Call your doctor right away if you have slow, shallow, or trouble breathing.

- Even one dose of this drug may be deadly if it is taken by someone else or by accident, especially in children. If this drug is taken by someone else or by accident, get medical help right away.
- Keep all drugs in a safe place. Keep all drugs out of the reach of children and pets.
- A type of abnormal heartbeat (prolonged QT interval) has happened with this drug. Sometimes, this has led to another type of unsafe abnormal heartbeat (torsades de pointes). Call your doctor right away if you have a fast or abnormal heartbeat, or if you pass out.
- Severe side effects have happened when opioid drugs were used with benzodiazepines, alcohol, marijuana, other forms of cannabis, or street drugs. This includes severe drowsiness, breathing problems, and death. Benzodiazepines include drugs like alprazolam, diazepam, and lorazepam. If you have questions, talk with the doctor.

- Many drugs interact with this drug and can raise the chance of side effects like deadly breathing problems. Talk with your doctor and pharmacist to make sure it is safe to use this drug with all of your drugs.
- Get medical help right away if you feel very sleepy, very dizzy, or if you pass out. Caregivers or others need to get medical help right away if the patient does not respond, does not answer or react like normal, or will not wake up.
- If you are pregnant or plan to get pregnant, talk with your doctor right away about the benefits and risks of using this drug during pregnancy. Using this drug for a long time during pregnancy may lead to withdrawal in the newborn baby. Withdrawal in the newborn can be life-threatening if not treated.

Opioid use disorder:

- If you are taking this drug to treat opioid use disorder, you must be in a certified care program to get it.

All liquid products:

- Make sure you have the right liquid; there is more than one strength.

- Be sure that you know how to measure your dose. Dosing errors can lead to accidental overdose and death. If you have any questions, talk with your doctor or pharmacist.

What is this drug used for?

- It is used to treat opioid use disorder.
- Some products are used to manage pain when daily pain treatment is needed for a long time. It is for use when non-opioid pain drugs do not treat your pain well enough or you cannot take them.

What do I need to tell my doctor BEFORE I take this drug?

- If you are allergic to this drug; any part of this drug; or any other drugs, foods, or substances. Tell your doctor about the allergy and what signs you had.
- If you have any of these health problems: Lung or breathing problems like asthma, trouble breathing, or sleep apnea; high levels of carbon dioxide in the blood; or stomach or bowel block or narrowing.
- If you have taken certain drugs for depression or Parkinson's disease in the last 14 days. This includes isocarboxazid, phenelzine, tranylcypromine, selegiline, or rasagiline. Very high blood pressure may happen.

- If you are taking any of these drugs: Buprenorphine, butorphanol, linezolid, methylene blue, nalbuphine, or pentazocine.

This is not a list of all drugs or health problems that interact with this drug.

Tell your doctor and pharmacist about all of your drugs (prescription or OTC, natural products, vitamins) and health problems. You must check to make sure that it is safe for you to take this drug with all of your drugs and health problems. Do not start, stop, or change the dose of any drug without checking with your doctor.

What are some things I need to know or do while I take this drug?
For all uses of this drug:

- Tell all of your health care providers that you take this drug. This includes your doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and dentists.
- Avoid driving and doing other tasks or actions that call for you to be alert until you see how this drug affects you.
- To lower the chance of feeling dizzy or passing out, rise slowly if you have been sitting or lying down. Be careful going up and down stairs.

- This drug may affect certain lab tests. Tell all of your health care providers and lab workers that you take this drug.
- Low blood sugar has happened with this drug. Some patients have needed to go to the hospital. Many times this happened in patients with a risk for low blood sugar like diabetes. Check blood sugar as you have been told by the doctor.
- Do not take this drug with other strong pain drugs or if you are using a pain patch without talking to your doctor first.
- Do not take more than what your doctor told you to take. Do not take more often or for longer than you were told. Doing any of these things may raise the chance of severe side effects.
- If you have been taking this drug for a long time or at high doses, it may not work as well and you may need higher doses to get the same effect. This is known as tolerance. Call your doctor if this drug stops working well. Do not take more than ordered.
- Long-term or regular use of opioid drugs like this drug may lead to dependence. Lowering the dose or stopping this drug all of a sudden may cause a greater risk of withdrawal or other severe problems. Talk to your

doctor before you lower the dose or stop this drug. You will need to follow your doctor's instructions. Tell your doctor if you have more pain, mood changes, thoughts of suicide, or any other bad effects.

- If you are allergic to tartrazine (FD&C Yellow No. 5), talk with your doctor. Some products have tartrazine.
- Do not take with alcohol or products that have alcohol. Unsafe and sometimes deadly effects may happen.
- This drug may raise the chance of seizures in some people, including people who have had seizures in the past. Talk to your doctor to see if you have a greater chance of seizures while taking this drug.
- If you are 65 or older, use this drug with care. You could have more side effects.
- Tell your doctor if you are breast-feeding. This drug passes into breast milk and may harm your baby. Get medical help right away if your baby seems very sleepy, is limp, or has trouble breathing.

If taking this drug for pain:

- If your pain gets worse, if you feel more sensitive to pain, or if you have new pain after you take this drug, call your doctor right away. Do not take more than ordered.

What are some side effects that I need to call my doctor about right away?

WARNING/CAUTION: Even though it may be rare, some people may have very bad and sometimes deadly side effects when taking a drug. Tell your doctor or get medical help right away if you have any of the following signs or symptoms that may be related to a very bad side effect:

- Signs of an allergic reaction, like rash; hives; itching; red, swollen, blistered, or peeling skin with or without fever; wheezing; tightness in the chest or throat; trouble breathing, swallowing, or talking; unusual hoarseness; or swelling of the mouth, face, lips, tongue, or throat.
- Signs of low potassium levels like muscle pain or weakness, muscle cramps, or a heartbeat that does not feel normal.
- Signs of low magnesium levels like mood changes, muscle pain or weakness, muscle cramps or spasms, seizures, shakiness, decreased appetite, severe upset stomach or throwing up, or an abnormal heartbeat.
- Signs of low blood sugar like dizziness, headache, feeling sleepy, feeling weak, shaking, a fast heartbeat, confusion, hunger, or sweating.
- Signs of esophagus problems like chest pain, trouble swallowing, pain when swallowing, or new or worse

heartburn.

- Severe dizziness or passing out.
- Chest pain or pressure.
- Slow heartbeat.
- Trouble breathing, slow breathing, or shallow breathing.
- Noisy breathing.
- Breathing problems during sleep (sleep apnea).
- Feeling confused.
- Severe constipation or stomach pain. These may be signs of a severe bowel problem.
- Hallucinations (seeing or hearing things that are not there).
- Mood changes.
- Seizures.
- Shortness of breath, a big weight gain, or swelling in the arms or legs.
- Trouble sleeping.
- Trouble passing urine.
- Any unexplained bruising or bleeding.
- Change in eyesight.
- Not able to control eye movements.

- A severe and sometimes deadly problem called serotonin syndrome may happen if you take this drug with certain other drugs. Call your doctor right away if you have agitation; change in balance; confusion; hallucinations; fever; fast or abnormal heartbeat; flushing; muscle twitching or stiffness; seizures; shivering or shaking; sweating a lot; severe diarrhea, upset stomach, or throwing up; or severe headache.
- Long-term use of an opioid drug may lead to lower sex hormone levels. Call your doctor if you have a lowered interest in sex, fertility problems, no menstrual period, or ejaculation problems.
- Taking an opioid drug like this drug may lead to a rare but severe adrenal gland problem. Call your doctor right away if you feel very tired or weak, you pass out, or you have severe dizziness, very upset stomach, throwing up, or decreased appetite.

What are some other side effects of this drug?

All drugs may cause side effects. However, many people have no side effects or only have minor side effects. Call your doctor or get medical help if any of these side effects or any other side effects bother you or do not go away:

All products:

- Constipation, stomach pain, upset stomach, throwing up, or decreased appetite.
- Dry mouth.
- Feeling dizzy, sleepy, tired, or weak.
- Headache.
- Sweating a lot.
- Weight gain.

Injection:

- Irritation where the shot is given.

These are not all of the side effects that may occur. If you have questions about side effects, call your doctor. Call your doctor for medical advice about side effects.

You may report side effects to your national health agency.

You may report side effects to the FDA at 1- 800-332-1088. You may also report side effects at https://www.fda.gov/medwatch.

How is this drug best taken?

Use this drug as ordered by your doctor. Read all information given to you. Follow all instructions closely.

All oral products:

- Take by mouth only.
- Take with or without food. Take with food if it causes an upset stomach.
- Do not use for fast pain relief or on an as needed basis.
- Do not use for pain relief after surgery if you have not been taking drugs like this drug.
- Do not inject or snort this drug. Doing any of these things can cause very bad side effects like trouble breathing and death from overdose.

All liquid products:

- Measure liquid doses carefully. Use the measuring device that comes with this drug. If there is none, ask the pharmacist for a device to measure this drug.
- Do not use a household teaspoon or tablespoon to measure this drug. Doing so could lead to the dose being too high.

Liquid (concentrate):

- Mix with water or other liquid as you have been told by the doctor.

Tablets for suspension:

- Dissolve in 4 ounces (120 mL) of water, orange juice, or other acidic fruit drink. Drink when dissolved.
- After drinking, rinse the rest of the drug in the glass with more juice or water and drink.

Injection:

- It is given as a shot into a muscle, vein, or into the fatty part of the skin.

Opioid use disorder:

- You may need to go to a clinic for your dose.

What do I do if I miss a dose?

Injection:

- Call your doctor to find out what to do.

All other products:

- Take a missed dose as soon as you think about it.
- If it is close to the time for your next dose, skip the missed dose and go back to your normal time.

- Do not take 2 doses at the same time or extra doses.

Opioid use disorder:

- Call your doctor to find out what to do.

How do I store and/or throw out this drug?

All oral products:

- Sometimes this drug is stored in a hospital, clinic, or doctor's office. If you are storing this drug at home, store at room temperature.
- Store in a dry place. Do not store in a bathroom.
- Protect from light.

Injection:

- If you need to store this drug at home, talk with your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist about how to store it.

All products:

- Store this drug in a safe place where children cannot see or reach it, and where other people cannot get to it. A locked box or area may help keep this drug safe. Keep all drugs away from pets.
- Throw away unused or expired drugs. Do not flush down a toilet or pour down a drain unless you are told to do so. Check with your pharmacist if you have questions

about the best way to throw out drugs. There may be drug take-back programs in your area.

General drug facts

- If your symptoms or health problems do not get better or if they become worse, call your doctor.
- Do not share your drugs with others and do not take anyone else's drugs.
- Some drugs may have another patient information leaflet. If you have any questions about this drug, please talk with your doctor, nurse, pharmacist, or other health care provider.
- This drug comes with an extra patient fact sheet called a Medication Guide. Read it with care. Read it again each time this drug is refilled. If you have any questions about this drug, please talk with the doctor, pharmacist, or other health care provider.
- Drugs called naloxone and nalmefene can be used to help treat an overdose of this drug. Talk with your doctor or pharmacist about how to get or use naloxone or nalmefene. If you think there has been an overdose, get medical care right away even if naloxone or nalmefene has been used. Be ready to tell or show what was taken, how much, and when it happened.
- If you think there has been an overdose, call your poison

control center or get medical care right away. Be ready to tell or show what was taken, how much, and when it happened.

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If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

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