

# employer tools & resources



**ISSUE:** People who are in addictions recovery may be prescribed substances such as Methadone as part of their treatment process. Methadone is a proven prescribed medication for the treatment of heroin addiction, and is part of a Harm Reduction Strategy.

**THINGS TO CONSIDER:** Methadone is prescribed differently for different people.

- An employee who is recovering from heroin addiction may require methadone in order to abstain from using heroin. If prescribed properly, what methadone does is fills those receptors in the brain that heroin affects *without* the “high” one receives from heroin. In the absence of methadone, a recovering heroin addict has huge cravings for heroin and the physical symptoms of detox are very painful. Methadone has become useful to increase their recovery success and help clear their head in order to better focus and set goals. Heroin users typically can only focus on getting their next hit. Methadone also helps people get their appetite back, regular sleeping patterns, dressing properly and so forth.
- A person receiving methadone may receive different doses depending on where they are at in terms of their recovery cycle.
- What are the possible side effects of using Methadone? Some sweating, and if not prescribed the right amount or too much, drowsiness. Typically, if a person is receiving the correct dose they will appear normal.
- What are the side effects of changing the dose of Methadone? Reducing the dosage may result in aches, and increasing methadone may increase drowsiness.
- Medical Doctors with special training prescribe methadone to patients.
- Methadone needs to be taken every 24 hours and at the same time each day.
- People can only receive Methadone from select pharmacies, and must take methadone under the supervision of a pharmacist. Methadone patients who have proven their ability to take Methadone on a regular schedule and the correct dosage may be able to administer their own methadone at home. Typically this would only be 1 week’s dosage.
- Like with any relapse, an employer would see signs such as a change in behaviour and appearance with an employee who is not taking their Methadone on schedule. Worse, you may not likely see them showing up to work at all if they have relapsed back into heroin use.

**THINGS TO DO:**

- Employers need to be flexible about scheduling when an employee needs to a) See their MD Methadone Specialist (there are not enough currently) and b) the time its takes an employee to visit their pharmacy and receive their daily dosage during business hours. Perhaps this means starting a little later than other employees.
- It is important that employers respect confidentiality about employees who may be prescribed Methadone. From experience, there is a stigma attached to users of Methadone.
- It is critical that employers educate themselves and understand that using Methadone, which is a Harm Reduction strategy, is the reality for treating heroin addiction.
- People vary in terms of how much or how long they will require Methadone. Some people may require Methadone all of their lives. Others may no longer require methadone because they have made a commitment to their recovery and worked closely with their Medical Doctor in weaning themselves off in addition to having strong ‘wrap around’ supports in place.
- The weaning process for Methadone if done well and in small increments may result in few noticeable changes to the person.

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