

**Regina Qu'Appelle Health Region
Harm Reduction Methadone
Maintenance Program**

**Finding Your Path
to
Freedom from Addiction**

Located at

1048 Albert Street
Regina, Saskatchewan S4R 2P8
Telephone: (306) 766-6350
Fax: (306) 766-7069

Clinic Hours

Monday to Friday

8:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.
1:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Saturday, Sunday, and Holidays

11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

To get copies of this brochure, call (306) 766-6350.

Methadone

Methadone is a long acting synthetic opioid narcotic medication. It is an effective and legal substitute for heroin, morphine, or other opiates. Methadone is used to assist a person wanting to quit the use of this class of drugs. A methadone recovery program is only a part of a recovery process.

How Methadone Works

When taken as directed, methadone blocks the effect of other opiates in the brain, prevents physical withdrawal, and reduces drug cravings

Methadone is not a Cure

There is no easy cure for drug dependence. Methadone helps a person quit by reducing withdrawal symptoms and cravings. After a person has been stabilized on methadone they must work to improve all aspects of their life. This can include going to counselling appointments, joining recovery groups, starting school or life-skills classes, working on a career, and other positive changes.

How Methadone is Taken

Methadone powder is mixed with a liquid such as Tang or lemonade and taken as a “drink”. Methadone is a long acting medication that is taken once a day .

When a person first starts taking methadone, they must attend a clinic or pharmacy each day to drink their medication in front of a nurse or pharmacist.

As a person progresses in their treatment and life becomes more stable, they may be able to take doses home. These doses are called “carries”.

How a Methadone Program Works

To begin taking methadone, a person can walk into or call the clinic. Staff set up a time for the person to see a counsellor as soon as possible.

The counsellor completes an intake assessment. This includes a history of the client's medical problems, drug use, treatment, social, and legal problems. This helps the counsellor decide if the person is a candidate for methadone treatment. The counsellor explains how methadone works and how the program runs. If the person qualifies as a candidate for methadone treatment and agrees to the conditions of the program, they sign a "Treatment Agreement".

Before starting methadone treatment, it is important for a client to have a physical examination by a doctor. This includes blood work to test for diseases like HIV and Hepatitis C, and liver functions. This is to ensure their body is healthy enough to handle the methadone.

The client then sees a methadone prescribing doctor. The doctor assesses their physical health and starts them on a regulated dose of methadone. The dose is different for every person. The client sees the doctor regularly to reassess their health and change the dose of methadone if needed.

The client sees a counsellor to further develop a treatment plan and receives support.

Methadone is a Medical Treatment and a Harm Reduction Program

As a medical treatment, methadone stabilizes the patient and prevents withdrawal symptoms and cravings. As a harm reduction measure, it eliminates the need to inject opiates, thus reducing the transmission of HIV, hepatitis, and other blood borne diseases as well as reducing harms against society.

Methadone Patients are Monitored for Compliance

Methadone patients are required to submit to regular unscheduled urine screening (or other tests) to monitor their dosage of methadone and to verify if other drugs are being used or not. Continuous mixing of methadone with other drugs, such as alcohol, street drugs, or other prescriptions may result in being weaned off the program by the doctor and counsellor.

Methadone is Addictive

It is addictive, the patient builds both tolerance (physical dependence) and psychological dependence.

Clients on Methadone can Participate in Treatment

Being on methadone is not like "using". People on methadone can readily participate in inpatient or outpatient treatment, and indeed many doctors insist on their clients seeing an addiction counsellor as a condition of their being on methadone.

- **Reduces Drug Interactions**

Street drugs are often mixed in dangerous combinations, many times without the client even knowing.

Methadone is a controlled substance that must be prescribed by a doctor and given out by an appropriate health care professional, with the intent of reducing the risks associated with mixing drugs.

- **Increases Access to Counselling and Treatment**

All doctor's prescribing methadone should be connected with a counsellor so that the client has more access to help. This help includes support in dealing with legal, social, and emotional problems, finding a job, or taking further education.

- **Improves Parenting Ability**

A methadone program can help an addicted person concentrate on family life, such as attending parenting skills workshops. Methadone maintenance therapy may improve a parent's chance of having an ongoing relationship with their children.

How Long a Person Stays on Methadone

All clients are told that the methadone maintenance program recommends a 2 year commitment. This time allows clients to develop a recovery plan and make the lifestyle changes that are necessary for sobriety. After consultation with their doctor and counsellor, the client may begin to gradually reduce their methadone levels. Trying to quit "cold turkey" (all of a sudden) can be life threatening or put the person at high risk to relapse.

Is Methadone Dangerous?

When used as prescribed, it is a safe and effective medication.

When used inappropriately and /or mixed with other drugs, it can potentially cause an overdose and death.

Methadone can Interact with Other Drugs and Medication

Methadone can interact with alcohol, street drugs, prescription medications, over the counter medications, and herbal remedies.

Each client must discuss ALL medications and street drugs they are taking with their family doctor, counsellor, methadone prescribing doctor, and pharmacist, to ensure their safety.

Methadone Side Effects

Once a person's dosage is stabilized, methadone is usually well tolerated. Some people may experience these symptoms which cause discomfort but are rarely dangerous.

- **Sweating**

Methadone dosage may be too high or too low.

- **Constipation**

Eating high fibre foods (e.g. fruit, vegetables, and whole grain bread), an increase in fluids, and/or regular exercise may help.

- **Sexual changes**

Some people have less interest in sexual activity, while others have more interest because they are feeling better.

- **Sleepiness/drowsiness**

Drowsiness should be discussed with the doctor, as it may be caused by too high a dose.

- **Weight gain**

Generally occurs as the person's body tries to readjust to an improved eating pattern.

Benefits of Methadone

While every opiate addict's reasons are unique, the most common reason is a sincere desire to want to make changes in their lives. Some of the benefits of this program are:

- **Reduce Cravings and Withdrawal**

By reducing cravings while not causing a high, methadone allows an addicted person to concentrate on important aspects of life, such as physical health, school, work, and family.

- **Reduces Infection**

Because methadone is taken orally, it eliminates or reduces problems such as heart infections, chalk lung, and abscesses. Without the need for needles, the risk of the spread of blood borne diseases is reduced.

- **Increases Employment Opportunities**

Because methadone is long acting, it only needs to be taken once a day. This allows more time to focus on other things such as school and work.

- **Reduces Criminal Activity**

Methadone maintenance therapy reduces the need for crime such as theft, trafficking, and prostitution that is associated with use of street drugs

- **Reduces Risks during Pregnancy**

The dangerous and sudden withdrawal process that can happen when a person stops using street drugs can cause harm to or possibly kill a fetus. Methadone stops this sudden withdrawal!

Harm Reduction Methadone Clinic
1048 Albert Street
Regina, Saskatchewan S4P 2E3
Phone: (306) 766-6350

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Visit us on the web:
www.rqhealth.ca

For 24 hour professional health advice and information, call



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