

What are the risks when mixing methadone or Suboxone® with other drugs?

Using methadone or Suboxone® with some drugs creates a risk of overdose. Combining methadone or Suboxone® with alcohol, sedatives or other opioids creates the greatest risk.

Although medication assisted therapy deaths are rare, they are almost always due to combining methadone with other drugs. For this reason, it's always important to talk to program staff about any other medications before you use them. This is also why we monitor your progress and safety with urine testing.

It's dangerous for somebody else to take your medication. For people not used to taking opioid drugs and who haven't developed a tolerance to them, a single dose can be fatal. A very small amount of methadone can be fatal to a child. It's important you keep your methadone or Suboxone® in a safe place and not allow anybody else to take it.

Should I take methadone or Suboxone® if I am pregnant?

If you are pregnant and dependent on an opioid drug (such as heroin, morphine or fentanyl), it is strongly advised that you enter a treatment program as soon as possible. Pregnant women are given top priority at all addiction treatment clinics across Alberta. If you are already on methadone and become pregnant, you should stay on methadone. Stopping methadone will put your baby at risk. Because some methadone crosses from the mother to baby in the womb, your baby may experience withdrawal symptoms for the first few days after birth. This is easily treated and has no long-term effects on the baby.

Mothers on methadone can breastfeed their babies. Even though methadone shows up in the breast milk, studies show that the amount is too small to affect the baby.

Please note that Suboxone® has not yet been approved for use during pregnancy.

How much methadone or Suboxone® will I be taking?

Determining the right methadone or Suboxone® dose for you is an important part of the early phase of treatment. A good maintenance dose will keep you from having cravings or withdrawal, or feeling either drowsy or high. We encourage you to talk openly to us about your symptoms so we can find the right dose for you.

Does methadone or Suboxone® change how I feel pain?

You will feel pain just like somebody who isn't on methadone or Suboxone®. If you experience pain while on the program, it can and should be treated properly. However, your pain medications will need to be managed differently when you are on medication assisted therapy. Be sure to tell any doctor treating you for pain that you're on methadone or Suboxone®. Certain painkillers fight against methadone and can cause uncomfortable withdrawal symptoms. Drugs like Nubain®, Stadol®, Talwin® and Darvon® should be avoided. Suboxone® will block the effects of opioid medication and can cause challenges with pain control or if anesthesia is required.

ODP staff need to know if you're being prescribed any other medication, because other medications can affect your methadone or Suboxone® dose. We will ask you for copies of any prescription medication you are prescribed, and we may follow up with your doctor.

Is methadone or Suboxone® harder to kick than other opioids?

If the strength and amount of the drug used are similar, you will have similar symptoms when you suddenly stop using, whether it's methadone, Suboxone®, or any other opioid. However, withdrawal from other opioids tends to be intense and shorter, while methadone or Suboxone® withdrawal is milder and lasts longer. If you want to stop using methadone or Suboxone®, we will develop a plan with you and can taper you off by gradually decreasing your dose. This way, withdrawal effects will be minimal.

What side effects do methadone or Suboxone® have?

When taken in the correct dosage, methadone and Suboxone® have few negative side effects. Some people experience nausea, vomiting, sweating, constipation, sedation (sleepiness) or sexual problems. Women might find that their menstrual cycle becomes irregular, although they are still able to get pregnant. These symptoms typically disappear within the first few weeks of treatment, once a correct dose has been established. Some effects, like constipation and sweating, may last longer.

WHERE CAN I GET MORE HELP?

Alberta Health Services and its funded agencies offer a range of treatment services, from information sessions to more intensive day programs or specialized residential programs. Feel free to discuss these opportunities with the ODP staff.

Treatment works best when combined with other supportive services available in your community. There are 12-step programs available across the province (such as Narcotics Anonymous and Alcoholics Anonymous). Check your phone book for information on the group nearest you.

Bonnyville Opioid Dependency Program

Room 201
4902 – 50 Avenue
Bonnyville, AB T9N 2H4
Phone: 780-826-8034
Fax: 780-826-8057

Calgary Opioid Dependency Program

#2130 Sheldon Chumir
Health Centre
1213 – 4th Street SW
Calgary, AB T2R 0X7
Phone: 403-297-5118
Fax: 403-297-4985

Cardston Opioid Dependency Treatment Clinic

Cardston Health Centre
2nd Floor, 144 – 2 Street W
Cardston, AB T0K 0K0
Phone: 403-653-5283
Fax: 403-653-5289

Edmonton Opioid Dependency Program

10010 – 102A Avenue
Edmonton, AB T5J 0G5
Phone: 780-422-1302
Fax: 780-427-0777

Fort McMurray Opioid Dependency Program

451 Sakitawaw Trail
Fort McMurray, AB T9H 4P3
Phone: 780-793-8300
Fax: 780-793-8301

Grande Prairie Opioid Dependency Program

11333 – 106 Street
Grande Prairie, AB T8V 6T7
Phone: 780-833-4991
Fax: 780-833-4715

High Prairie Opioid Dependency Program

5101 – 38 Street
High Prairie, AB T0G 1E0
Phone: 780-536-2136
Fax: 780-536-2148

Rural Opioid Dependency Program

Box 1000
Ponoka, AB, T4J 1R8
Phone: 1-844-383-7688
Fax: 403-783-7610

For a complete listing of treatment clinics for opioid dependence in Alberta, visit DrugSafe.ca

For more information and to find an addiction services office near you, please call the 24-hour Addiction Helpline at 1-866-332-2322.



INFORMATION FOR APPLICANTS

Is this program for me?

The ODP program provides medication assisted therapy treatment (methadone and Suboxone®) for people dependent on opioids. Opioids include drugs that come from the opium poppy (such as morphine, codeine, and heroin) as well as man-made painkillers (such as fentanyl, Percocet® and OxyContin®). Methadone and Suboxone® are substitution drugs. When you are on the right dose of medication, you should not experience cravings for opioids or symptoms of physical withdrawal. You also should not experience drowsiness or a high from either medication. You can stay on methadone or Suboxone® for many years, or you can use them as a step toward getting off opioids altogether. The ODP program is voluntary and our service is confidential.

What can I expect to get out of this program?

If you are accepted into this program, you can expect

- to be treated with respect and dignity
- to become stabilized on a methadone or Suboxone® dose that's right for you
- to be connected to counselling services and other support programs in the community to help you in your recovery
- to begin to restore your health and improve your day-to-day functioning

How do I apply?

Application to the program varies by site. Please contact your local Alberta Health Services Addiction and Mental Health to find out more information.

What happens once I get to the ODP clinic?

Your first appointment may take one to two hours and again may vary clinic to clinic:

- You will be seen by an ODP staff member, who will ask you questions about your drug use and social history. Forms will be reviewed and signed.
- You will be asked to provide a urine sample, which will tell us what drugs you have been using.
- You will need to give us your Personal Health Number. If you need to apply for one, call (780) 427-1432. If you are outside Edmonton, call (780) 310-0000 and you can be connected toll-free.
- You will be seen by a doctor, who will interview you and give you a medical examination.
- You can be started on methadone or Suboxone® the same day you see the doctor, if you can cover the dispensing fee. Talk to ODP staff about ways of covering this ongoing cost.

What happens once I'm on the program?

- Dosing will be dependent on which clinic you are accessing; however during the stabilization phase you will be required to attend either the clinic or a pharmacy daily for medication. Weekend dosing will vary as per your attached clinic; please talk to the staff about where you will be required to dose. During the stabilization period, your medication (Suboxone® or methadone), will be gradually increased until you are on the dose that is right for you. The right dose is when you have no cravings, no drowsiness and no withdrawal symptoms.
- You will be able to see the counsellor. Staff will help you set recovery goals and make a treatment plan. Staff are there to support you and can make referrals to other programs and services that may help you.
- While you are on the program, you will be asked to provide urine samples on a random basis. This helps us monitor your progress and any drugs you may be taking. We do this because there is a risk of overdose if you combine methadone or Suboxone® with some other drugs, and we want to do everything we can to keep you safe while on the program.
- You are responsible for the cost of your medication. You must make arrangements directly with your pharmacy. If you are worried about this, ask ODP staff about payment options.

What happens once I'm on the right dose?

- Once you are on a stable dose of methadone or Suboxone® and have been regularly attending the program, you may be able to attend a community pharmacy or be eligible for carries. Carries are take-home doses of your medication.,
- Carries are dependent on stability, and urine tests negative for other drugs and alcohol. The decision for carries is made at the physician's discretion.
- You will need to see the ODP physician for medical examinations regularly when stabilizing and less frequently the longer you have been on the program.
- Throughout this time and afterwards, you will be able to make appointments to meet with staff as needed.
- We will continue to ask you for random urine samples.

FACTS ABOUT MEDICATION

What are methadone and Suboxone®?

Methadone belongs to a group of drugs called opioids. This group includes other narcotic analgesics (strong, pain-relieving drugs) such as codeine, morphine and heroin.

Methadone is a man-made drug that has been used since the 1960s as a substitute treatment for people dependent on opioids. Its effects are much longer lasting than other opioids; a single dose of methadone will last for over 24 hours. In the brain, methadone acts much like other opioid drugs do, but it does not produce the same high. It also reduces cravings for those other drugs.

There is much research that proves methadone is an effective treatment for dependence on opioids.

Suboxone® is another option for medication assisted therapy. It is a combination of the drugs buprenorphine and naloxone, comes in a tablet form, and dissolves under the tongue. It has some key differences from methadone, which the ODP physician can speak to you about.

Why take medication assisted therapy?

The biggest reason to consider taking medication assisted therapy is that it can help you take control of a difficult drug dependency.

When on the right dose of methadone or Suboxone®, you shouldn't have cravings or withdrawal symptoms. It can also help you to stop or reduce injecting, if that has been your method of drug use, which greatly reduces your risk of getting diseases like hepatitis and HIV.

As you become stabilized on methadone or Suboxone®, you can start to focus on stabilizing other things that are important in your life, such as your health, your family, work or school.

How safe are methadone and Suboxone®?

Many years of research have shown that methadone and Suboxone® is medically safe if taken under a doctor's care. Once the right dose of methadone or Suboxone® has been established, you should experience few side effects and will find that the medication doesn't change your ability to think clearly or function normally. Unlike other drugs, you won't need to take higher and higher doses of methadone or Suboxone® over time to get the same effect, and they cause no harm to your body or organs. This is true even for people who have been on medication assisted therapy for over 20 years.