

## Myths & Facts About Methadone



**MYTH:** *Methadone gets into your bones and weakens them.*

**FACT:** Methadone does not "get into the bones" or in any other way cause harm to the skeletal system. Although some FACT: Methadone patients report having aches in their arms and legs, the discomfort is probably a mild withdrawal symptom and may be eased by adjusting the dose of methadone. Also, some substances can cause more rapid metabolism of methadone. If you are taking another substance that is affecting the metabolism of your methadone, your

doctor may need to adjust your methadone dose.

**MYTH:** *It's harder to kick methadone than it is to kick a dope habit.*

**FACT:** Stopping methadone use is different from kicking a heroin habit. Some people find it harder because the withdrawal lasts longer. Others say that although it lasts longer, it is milder than heroin withdrawal.

**MYTH:** *Taking methadone damages your body.*

**FACT:** People have been taking methadone for more than 30 years, and there has been no evidence that long-term



use causes any physical damage. Some people do suffer some side effects from methadone-such as constipation, increased sweating, and dry mouth-but these usually go away over time or with dose adjustments. Other effects, such as menstrual abnormalities and decreased sexual desire, have been reported by some patients but have not been clearly linked to methadone use.

**MYTH:** *Methadone is worse for your body than heroin*

**FACT:** Methadone is not worse for your body than heroin. Both heroin and methadone are non toxic, yet both can be dangerous if taken in excess- but this is true of everything, from aspirin to food. Methadone is safer than street heroin because it is a legally prescribed medication and it is taken orally. Unregulated street drugs often contain many harmful additives that are used to "cut" the drug.

**MYTH:** *Methadone harms your liver.*

**FACT:** The liver metabolizes (breaks down and processes) methadone, but methadone does not "harm" the liver. Methadone is actually much easier for the liver to metabolize than many other types of medications. People with hepatitis or with severe liver disease can take methadone safely.

**MYTH:** *Methadone is harmful to your immune system.*

**FACT:** Methadone does not damage the immune system. In fact, several studies suggest that HIV-positive patients who are taking methadone are healthier and live longer than those drug users who are not on methadone.



**MYTH:** *Methadone causes people to use cocaine.*

**FACT:** Methadone does not cause people to use cocaine. Many people who use cocaine started taking it before they started methadone maintenance treatment and many stop using cocaine while they are on maintenance.

**MYTH:** *The lower the dose of methadone, the better.*

**FACT:** low doses will reduce withdrawal symptoms, but higher doses are needed to block the effect of heroin and-most important-to cut the craving for heroin. Most patients will need between 60 and 120 milligrams of methadone a day to stop using heroin. A few patients, however, will feel well with 5 to 10 milligrams; others will need hundreds of milligrams a day in order to feel comfortable. Ideally, patients should decide on their dose with the help of their physician, and without outside interference or limits.

**MYTH:** *Methadone causes drowsiness and sedation.*

**FACT:** All people sometimes feel drowsy or tired. Patients on a stabilized dose of methadone will not feel any more drowsy or sedated than is normal.(1)

*(1) Catania, Holly JD, About Methadone, Herlin Press, INC. 2000 (drugpolicy.org)*