

UNSUPERVISED (TAKE-AWAY) DOSES OF METHADONE

Important information for people on opioid maintenance treatment (OMT) about unsupervised (take-away) doses of methadone

In the ACT, everyone starts OMT with supervised daily dosing. Unsupervised dosing, or take-away doses, may be available to you when you have been in treatment for at least 3 months and you are progressing towards your agreed treatment goals.

Having take-away doses can improve your treatment by allowing you to manage your work/school/childcare commitments better, and help you get back into a settled life.

The benefits of take-away doses can include the following:

- You and the pharmacy can agree to a mutual weekly schedule
- Enhanced integration into the community
- Improved autonomy in the management of your medication and treatment in general
- Enhanced capacity to obtain and maintain employment
- Reduces the stigma associated with attending dosing points, particularly where there are confidentiality concerns
- Convenience of treatment
- Reduced costs associated with daily dosing at community pharmacies (e.g. Higher travel costs of accessing the centralised clinic compared with accessing the local pharmacy)
- Decreased likelihood of ceasing treatment prematurely

Access to unsupervised dosing is decided by your prescribing doctor. Your individual circumstances are an important consideration.

When checking how well you are progressing in treatment your prescribing doctor may consider the following things:

- Your management of your day to day life
- Your general physical and mental health
- Your dosing record
- Current hazardous use of other drugs and alcohol.

The table below is a **guide only** for the provision of unsupervised doses of methadone. Some clients may move to unsupervised dosing more or less quickly depending on circumstances as outlined above.

Length of time in treatment (months)	Methadone take-away doses (per week)	Comments
0 - 3	0	Exceptional circumstances may allow one dose
3 - 7	2	
7 - 9	3	
9 - 12 and thereafter	4	

If you think you are right for more than 4 take-away doses per week you need to talk about this with your prescribing doctor who would have to get approval from the Chief Health Officer (CHO) for this. Your prescribing doctor must provide the CHO with their assessment of how well you are progressing in treatment.

Transferring to the ACT

If you have transferred to the ACT your take-away doses will need to be assessed by your new prescribing doctor who may not continue the same take-away arrangements as your previous prescribing doctor.

Revising Unsupervised Dosing

Your prescribing doctor may decide to start split dosing, or revise or stop unsupervised dosing for you altogether if they think your treatment is not progressing well. Split dosing may involve one half dose being administered under the usual supervision of the pharmacist or their staff, and the remaining half dose being dispensed by the pharmacist as a take-away. If any of these changes happen you have the right to be told why and be given the opportunity to talk about this with your prescribing doctor and question the decision. You have the right to an advocate (someone who can present your case for you or just be with you) whenever you talk to your doctor.

Volume Expansion

Volume expansion is the addition of water to your methadone take-away. This may reduce the toxic effect if the preparation is accidentally consumed by someone else. In the ACT, volume expansion of methadone take-away doses is usual practice. You may discuss this issue with your prescribing doctor but there will need to be extenuating circumstances for volume expansion requirements to be removed from your prescription.

Advice on this matter may also be sought from other members of the treatment team (e.g. pharmacist). Any requirement for volume expansion should be clearly marked on the prescription, with the total volume of the take-away dose noted on the prescription.

For more information talk to your prescribing doctor or contact ACT Health - Alcohol and Drug Services on 6244 2591.

Other information factsheets produced for people on opioid maintenance treatment include:

- *Methadone Treatment and ECG Screening*
- *Unsupervised (Take-Away) Doses of Suboxone*
- *Opioid Maintenance Treatment (OMT) and Urine Drug Screening.*

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