Methadone or buprenorphine can help you deal with heroin or opioid use problems.

- They are not a cure for heroin or opioid dependence, but help manage your drug use.
- You can reduce or stop injecting and reduce the risk of getting HIV and hepatitis.

You will have better control over your drug use, so there will be more time for other areas of your life.

**Arrangements:** you need to have one doctor and one pharmacy for methadone or buprenorphine treatment. You need to:

- See your doctor regularly during the first few weeks, once or twice a week, until your dose holds you and you feel comfortable.
- Visit your pharmacy every day to pick up your dose when starting treatment.

**Methadone:**

- **Initial doses:** your doctor will start you on a low dose.
- This is for safety; to limit the risk of overdosing.
- Your dose will then be increased slowly until you no longer hang out.
- One dose is usually effective for 24 hours, so you will only need one dose a day.

**Buprenorphine:**

- Starting dose may be higher and increase more rapidly because of its relatively lower risk of overdose.
- Wait at least 6 hours after your last heroin use before starting buprenorphine, or you may suffer unpleasant withdrawal symptoms.

**Caution:** Methadone and buprenorphine are drugs like heroin and other opiates, so you can overdose on them.

- Overdose usually only happens when they are being taken at the same time as other sedating drugs like alcohol, tranquillisers (benzodiazepines), sleeping drugs, anti-depressants or some other drugs (check with your doctor).
- Do not take these drugs without your methadone/buprenorphine doctor’s advice.
- Taking methadone or buprenorphine with alcohol increases their sedating effects and the risk of overdose.

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** The risk of overdose is highest in the first 14 days of treatment.

This is because of low tolerance or a dose that is too high. Use of other sedating drugs also adds to the risk.

- Learn the symptoms of drug overdose and tell the people you are living with to watch for them and help you if necessary.
- Talk to your doctor or pharmacist straight away if you have slurred speech, feel drowsy, can’t stand up, or are ‘out of it’ and confused.

**Never leave a methadone patient to ‘sleep it off’**

Call an ambulance immediately: Dial 000
Overdose symptoms

‘Overdose’ usually involves the use of other sedating drugs (tranquilisers, sleeping pills, alcohol, or heroin)

The risk of overdose is highest in the first two weeks of treatment.

If you experience the overdose symptoms described here, don’t take another dose until you have discussed it with your doctor.

Symptoms vary from person to person and may include one or more of the following:

- Slurred speech
- Unsteady walking and poor balance
- Drowsiness
- Slowed movement, slow eating
- Stupor (‘out of it’, confused).

- Mouth to mouth resuscitation may be needed if the person is not breathing properly
- Unraversable, unresponsive, can’t be woken
- Snoring, gurgling, or spluttering when breathing
- Slow or shallow breathing, or not breathing
- Floppy limbs and neck
- Blue lips and fingers
- Clammy skin, pale
- Eyes rolling back.

Call an ambulance immediately and never leave the person to ‘sleep it off’.

Overdose warning

There is a danger of overdose and death if other drugs that depress or sedate brain activity are taken in unsupervised quantities with methadone or buprenorphine.

The drugs to avoid are:

- Alcohol
- Tranquilisers – benzodiazepines (Hypnodorm, Valium, Normison, Temaze, Serpex, Xanax, Antenex, Ducene, Murelax and others)
- The antiepileptic drug clonazepam (brand names include Rivotril)
- Painkillers containing dextropropoxyphene (brand names include Digesic and Doloxene)
- Heroin, oxycodone, morphine and codeine
- Combinations of any of these.

Your doctor may prescribe some sedating drugs to relieve unpleasant symptoms, but it is important that you take them only in quantities specified. Higher doses and uncontrolled combinations of drugs and alcohol with methadone cause several deaths each year in Victoria.

**Mixing drugs and alcohol with methadone or buprenorphine is dangerous.**