



Thinking about coming off Methadone?

You may start thinking about coming off methadone for many reasons:

- You have achieved your treatment goals and you feel stable in most areas of life.
- Pressure from others.
- Inconvenience/“liquid handcuffs”.
- Dissatisfaction with MMT.
- Health concerns.



Your case manager and doctor can assist you in assessing whether or not this is a good time for you to complete treatment.

- If you are unsure, you can try a dose decrease and see how you feel.
- Your decision doesn't have to be final as you can stop the detox at any time and there's a 3 month window period if you need to come back on the programme after coming off.

Conditions for a successful taper and staying abstinent in the long term:

Research suggests that there are certain conditions which are likely to lead to successful treatment completion which means you will complete your taper and are more likely to stay off drugs afterwards in the long term.

Here are some questions you need to think about, if you can answer 'yes' to most of them, you are more likely to be successful:

- Have you been on a stable methadone dose and achieved your treatment goals?
- Do you think you can maintain the achievements you have made while on the programme if you taper?
- Can you avoid illicit drug and excessive alcohol use?
- Do you have a support network of people who don't have problems with alcohol or other drugs?
- Do you have good strategies for dealing with everyday stresses?
- Do you know about relapse prevention: are you aware of your triggers to using alcohol or other drugs and do you have ways of coping with them without resorting to using alcohol or other drugs again?
- Have you stopped or significantly reduced any other drugs you may have used, other than opiates?
- If you relapse into drug use, do you have a plan to deal with this?

- Have you carefully thought about other solutions, if the main problem is the inconvenience of being on maintenance treatment? Have you talked about this with your case manager or the coordinator?
- Without methadone treatment, will you be able to sustain:
 1. Reduced or no harmful drug or alcohol use, especially IV drug use
 2. Your physical health
 3. Reduced or no criminal activity
 4. The increased stability at home and in your relationships that you have achieved

Organising your taper:

If you have decided to taper, talk with your case manager, doctor, family and support network they will help you. Then write your own plan:

- Clarify your reasons and fully assess your situation including the supports you have and the barriers to successfully coming off.
- Explore all options for the best way to come off using methadone or buprenorphine and determine which method you'd like to try. Whether you want to know at what rate you're coming down or not (blind or open withdrawal) and whether you want the rate to be fixed or to be flexible
- Discuss the option of using Naltrexone in combination with counselling after you finish your taper and are opiate -free
- Identify your support at home and advise you of support services in the community.
- Co-ordinate your plan including what kind of counselling, skills, supports and alternative treatments you can access.
- Plan how they will support you through the process.
- Decide on a realistic rate of reduction that will suit you.

You can also ask to see the Recovery Practitioner to help you plan and support you during your taper.

What is the Recovery Practitioner and how can they help me?

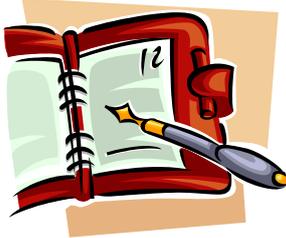


The recovery practitioner is an experienced alcohol and drug counsellor who can help you plan your taper and support you through it. During and after your taper, they can:

- Help you think about you're the qualities that you have and the people in your life who will help you succeed
- Help you identify the emotional, physical and environmental triggers that might lead you to lapse back in to drug use
- Teach you coping strategies to manage these triggers
- Create a relapse prevention plan with you
- Identify and help you address underlying issues that might have lead to your drug use in the past and perhaps may precipitate a lapse or relapse in the future if you don't resolve them

- Identify and address any issues in your current situation that might hinder the success of your detox
- See you regularly and encourage and support you during and after your detox to maximise the likelihood of success
- Give you and your family information about the process of detoxification and what you can expect
- Support your family/whanau to support you through the detox process
- Provide individual counselling once you have completed the detox if you have chosen to use Naltrexone
- Help you connect with the consumer advisor for support

Discharge planning



This is a plan you develop with your case manager or the recovery practitioner which includes:

- Your reasons for leaving
- The triggers and early warning signs that might lead you to use drugs again
- Coping strategies and a plan to address triggers and early warning signs
- What other support and treatment you might want during your taper
- What information and education your family needs in order to understand what you are going through
- Any other agencies involved
- Information about your possible re-entry to MMT: This relates to the window period you are able to negotiate with your case manager before you complete your treatment – meaning after your last dose you will still have a negotiated time frame of up to 3 months to re-engage with the service and return to your place on the methadone programme.
- What support/treatment you want from the service or from others **after** you have completed your taper, in order to help you maintain your success.