

Truth vs. Myth About Methadone Treatment

According to Emmett Velten, Ph. D., rumors thrive under two conditions: high emotion, and a lack of education. "The rumors and mythology surrounding methadone treatment may differ from normal rumors, because the emotionality surrounding methadone largely causes the lack of information about it. What causes the emotionality? Prejudice!" For some reason, methadone, a medication used to get addicts away from heroin (thus getting them away from using and/or sharing contaminated needles, contracting Hepatitis C or HIV and engaging in other high-risk behaviors) is connected to the same negative stigma as heroin abuse itself. Due to this misinformation, there are a large number of myths about methadone that simply are not true.

MYTH: Methadone is just trading one addiction for another.

Methadone patients are DEPENDENT on their medication the same way a diabetic is DEPENDENT on his insulin--they are not ADDICTED. When either patient does not take their medication on time as prescribed, they become sick. But according to the DSM-IV, methadone does not meet the require for an addictive drug. An addictive drug leads to significant impairment in functioning, causes the addict to continue to use despite related problems, and results in an increase in tolerance, meaning that over time more and more of the drug is needed to achieve the same effect. Opiate addiction is a brain disorder that causes permanent brain damage when used long-term. Methadone stabilizes the brain chemistry that heroin first deranged.

MYTH: Methadone is just as bad as heroin/is synthetic heroin.

Heroin is an illegal narcotic sold on the street by gun-wielding strangers. It may be cut with any number of additives, so that when ingested the user has no idea what he is putting into his body. Addiction at its worst may cause the user to beg, lie or even steal to acquire the large amount of money needed to fund a heroin addiction. IV drug users often develop dangerous abscesses and infections on their arms and legs. Life as a heroin addict is chaotic and clandestine, and the user quickly finds himself in a downward spiral. Methadone, on the other hand, is prescribed by a doctor and dispensed by nurses in a medical facility. Methadone, by eliminating withdrawal symptoms, stabilizes the client, thus allowing him to get his life back on track, secure a job, go back to school, properly care for his children, etc.

MYTH: Methadone was named after Adolf Hitler.

The liquid suspension that is presently dispensed by nearly all clinics is called methadone (the generic name) or methadose (brand name). Although it was indeed invented in Germany, the methadone wafer that synthesized for use in the United States went by the brand name Dolophine named after Vincent Dole (one of the New York physicians who marketed the drug.) The "-phine" comes from the term morphine, named after Morpheus the Greek god of dreams. It is mistakenly assumed that the "dolph" found in the word Dolophine actually comes from the "dolf" in Adolf Hitler.

MYTH: Methadone rots your teeth.

Although there is no scientific evidence which fully explains why, heroin addicts have a never-ending craving for sugar that causes them to consume massive amounts of sweets--gum, candy, and especially chocolate. When someone plunges into the deep abyss of addiction, personal hygiene tends to fall by the wayside. Dentist and doctor appointments are no longer a priority, and showering gets fit in to the schedule when it can. The same goes for brushing one's teeth. Everything that used to matter is overshadowed by the great monster of drug addiction, which trumps all, not to mention that heroin is the ultimate pain reliever, masking toothaches and any other oral sensitivities. Because of this, when a person finally begins to take a step in the right direction and starts taking methadone, their dental hygiene is way below average. One of the side-effects of methadone is that it may give you dry mouth, the same as many other medications. This may cause your teeth to produce more plaque, therefore leading to tooth decay and gum disease.

MYTH: Methadone is a legal way for addicts to get high.

Stabilized methadone patients who are on an adequate dose of methadone (not too high and not too low, and taken every day as prescribed) are indistinguishable from the rest of society. They hold down jobs, own homes and raise families. Many people consider methadone to be a life saver, and as long as the dose is not too high and causing the patient to feel drowsy, taking it causes clients to feel normal rather than euphoric, messed up, tranquilized or high.

MYTH: It's harder to get off methadone than it is to get off heroin.

Because methadone has a longer half-life than heroin, withdrawal from it is slower and longer if one was to stop taking it suddenly. Medically supervised withdrawal, on the other hand, where the client is gradually decreased over time under a doctor's supervision, can be relatively free of pain and discomfort.