

13. Methadone Takeaways



'Takeaways' refer to any individually measured and labelled daily doses of medication not consumed under observation of a pharmacist. Takeaways are usually available once people have moved beyond the stabilisation phase of opioid substitution treatment/OST.

Eligibility and assessment for takeaways

Takeaways aren't automatic or 'a right', nor are they linked to how long you've been on methadone.

Getting takeaways depends on agreement between you, your key worker, and prescribing doctor (and sometimes the pharmacist) that you are stable and reliable, and can comply with the safety requirements of the Service and the Ministry of Health. The kinds of things the Service is looking for are:

- You're not using alcohol and/or other drugs in a harmful or hazardous way.
- You schedule and attend key workers and doctor appointments
- You complete required lab tests on time.
- You rarely make requests for dispensing changes.
- You manage any other health conditions by engaging with a GP or other health professional.
- Your housing, employment/occupation, and relationships are stable.
- You're not involved in criminal activity.
- You can ensure that your takeaway/s will be stored safely.
- You have a GP or are actively looking for one.
- The potential for diversion of medication and overdose is limited.

This isn't a check list (even though it might look like one); you don't have to achieve each and every one of these bullet points – rather they give an overall picture of where you're at. (For more info, see Information Sheet 6 *Indicators of Stability*)

Assessment for takeaways usually includes urine drug screening showing positive for methadone and/or other prescribed meds but negative for other drugs of misuse especially alcohol, illicit opioids, benzos and amphetamines. When you've been assessed as stable and able to meet the safety requirements you, your key worker and doctor will sign a 'Responsibility for takeaway doses of methadone agreement' form.

Number of takeaways

The Practice Guidelines for OST in NZ 2008 (p.20) recommend that methadone should be consumed at the pharmacy on at least three non-consecutive days per week. Less frequent more flexible prescribing can be considered for stable clients to support 'community integration', employment, education/ training and other worthwhile activities. In general, 3 takeaways per week is the maximum available (depending on individual assessment) until clients transition to Shared Care.

If you're working and are asked to provide proof of employment so you can get more flexible dispensing, you can provide pay slips or bank account details showing your pay deposit. Some clients bring in a letter from their employer as proof – if it's on a letter head it will have more credence than a handwritten letter on a scrap of paper. Some people don't want to tell their employer why they

Also available:

1. Opioid treatment with AOTS
2. Facts about methadone
3. First methadone dose and stabilisation
4. Accidental overdose
5. Ongoing Opioid Substitution Treatment (OST)
6. Indicators of stability
7. Clinical tests: blood, urine, etc.
8. Restabilisation
9. Pharmacy dispensing
10. Changes to prescriptions
11. Holiday arrangements within NZ
12. Travelling overseas
13. Methadone takeaways
14. Shared Care with your GP
15. Thinking about coming off?
16. Involuntarily withdrawal
17. Pregnancy and opioid treatment
18. Methadone and medication interactions
19. Driving and OST
20. Finding a GP

Facts about buprenorphine (Suboxone®)

Suboxone® treatment with CADS

- need a letter and say it's to open a bank account or get a phone connected. It needs to say who you work for and how many hours a week you are working.
- Consideration can be given for additional takeaways for specific short time periods for circumstances like:
- Your usual pharmacy's not open during public holidays and going to another pharmacy isn't possible.
- You're travelling and can't access another pharmacy where you are going.
- Something unexpected happens such as a family crisis, having to go to a funeral or tangi, work commitments, illness, etc.
- The likelihood of getting extra takeaways in these circumstances will depend on your general stability, safety, and the reason for needing takeaways (i.e. it can be verified). However, instead of takeaways you may be scripted to another service or pharmacy.
- For practical reasons the service needs at least 3 working days notice to make the change to your prescription.
- According to the NZ Practice Guidelines 2008 (p.21) clients should have no more than 4 doses in hand, although flexibility should be considered for clients who show consistent stability.

Things to be aware of when you get takeaways

- You need to take your methadone or other prescribed medication as it's been prescribed (i.e. orally).
- The caps on takeaways methadone bottles can sometimes leak. Check that your doses are intact before you leave the pharmacy; once you've left the pharmacist cannot replace leaked bottles without authorisation from your prescriber. Also, any replacement doses have to be consumed on the premises – not taken away.
- Always keep your takeaways bottles upright. It's a good idea to put them in a small ziplock plastic bag – that way any leakage can be salvaged.
- Store your methadone or other prescribed medication safely and securely preferable in a locked cupboard or box. Child resistant caps are not child proof. Even small doses of methadone can be fatal to children and to adults who do not take methadone regularly.

For this reason it is not safe (nor is it necessary) to keep methadone in the refrigerator. (The manufacturer recommends storing Biodone in a cool place but does not recommend refrigeration.)

- Review of takeaways arrangements happen as part of treatment reviews or if there are concerns that you're not following the safety requirements.
- Any changes made by AOTS to your takeaways arrangements must be communicated to you as soon as possible.
- You need to give 4 weeks notice if you're planning a holiday. (See Information sheet 11 *Holiday Arrangements within NZ* and 12 *Going Overseas*)
- Transferring to Shared Care with your GP doesn't necessarily mean you get more takeaways. Your dispensing arrangements might become more flexible but this is a decision made with your GP and possibly your key worker.

Lost or stolen takeaways

- Pharmacists can't replace lost or stolen doses and AOTS will only replace them in exceptional circumstances which are verified. Any replacement doses have to be consumed on the premises – they can't be given as takeaways.
- Contact your key worker or local AOTS team immediately if your doses are lost or stolen.

Need to know more?

If you need more information about takeaways please speak with your key worker, doctor, or local AOTS team. For more information sheets, see CADS reception or visit the CADS website www.cads.org.nz/More/Brochures.asp

