

CLINIC INFORMATION:

HYDROMORPHONE

for the treatment of
opioid use disorder



Date: 03/18/2026



WHO IS HYDROMORPHONE FOR?

Hydromorphone is a short-acting medication that doctors prescribe to individuals who are seeking help for their severe opioid use (i.e., fentanyl), when they have been unable to stabilize on other opioid treatment medications. It helps individuals stop using unregulated opioids and also alleviates the uncomfortable physical symptoms that occur when they stop taking opioids after long-term use. Additionally, hydromorphone helps to reduce the strong urge to use unregulated opioids again.

WHEN DO DOCTORS RECOMMEND HYDROMORPHONE?

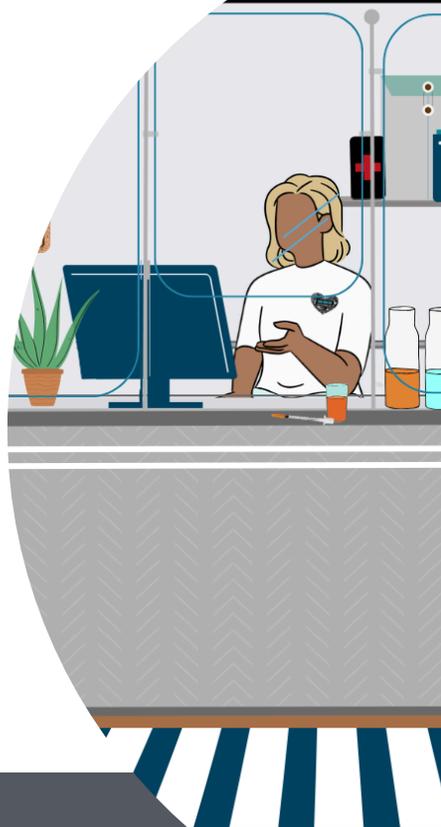
If withdrawal symptoms and cravings are not effectively managed with buprenorphine formulations, such as Suboxone® or Sublocade®, and methadone or Kadian®, hydromorphone may be considered.

HOW IS HYDROMORPHONE TAKEN?

Hydromorphone is a medicine that is prescribed to be taken every day at a Recovery Alberta Opioid Dependency Program (ODP) licensed to provide Narcotic Transition Services (NTS) clinic. A nurse or pharmacist will prepare the medication and watch you take it. It's available as pills to swallow, a liquid (note: "blue juice" is only offered at some clinics), or by injection.

It can be given by mouth or as a shot, up to 3 times a day.

The way you take your medication should depend on what works best for you.



HOW SOON CAN DOSES INCREASE?

Hydromorphone is started at a low dose and then gradually increased. This gradual process allows for the assessment of side effects and tolerance. When the medication is first started, the dose may be increased at each session, until a stable dose is reached.

WHAT HAPPENS IF I MISS A DOSE?

Like other opioids, tolerance to hydromorphone decreases if it is not taken daily. Missing several doses reduces tolerance, requiring a lower dose to avoid a poisoning.

If you stop taking hydromorphone, withdrawal symptoms will develop.

ARE THERE RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH HYDROMORPHONE?

Hydromorphone can be dangerous if taken with alcohol or other medications that make you sleepy. Mixing them can make it hard to breathe and can be very serious or even deadly.

Do not share your hydromorphone dose with anyone else. Your hydromorphone dose is specific to you and can cause a poisoning if someone else takes it.

SIDE EFFECTS OF HYDROMORPHONE

Hydromorphone is usually safe to take, but it can cause side effects. It may slow down how fast food moves through your stomach and intestines, which can lead to constipation and stomach upset. Hydromorphone can also make your pupils smaller, cause dizziness, and lead to itching because it releases histamine. If you take hydromorphone for a long time, your body might start to depend on it.