

## **Meth (Methamphetamine)**

Methamphetamine is an addictive stimulant drug that strongly activates certain systems in the brain. Methamphetamine is closely related chemically to amphetamine, but the central nervous system effects of methamphetamine are greater. Both drugs have some medical uses, primarily in the treatment of obesity, but their therapeutic use is limited.

Street methamphetamine is referred to by many names, such as "speed," "meth," and "chalk." Methamphetamine hydrochloride, clear chunky crystals resembling ice, which can be inhaled by smoking, is referred to as "ice," "crystal," and "glass."

## **Health Hazards**

**Neurological hazards.** Methamphetamine releases high levels of the neurotransmitter dopamine, which stimulates brain cells, enhancing mood and body movement. It also appears to have a neurotoxic effect, damaging brain cells that contain dopamine and serotonin, another neurotransmitter. Over time, methamphetamine appears to cause reduced levels of dopamine, which can result in symptoms like those of Parkinson's disease, a severe movement disorder.

**Addiction.** Methamphetamine is taken orally or intranasally (snorting the powder), by intravenous injection, and by smoking. Immediately after smoking or intravenous injection, the methamphetamine user experiences an intense sensation, called a "rush" or "flash," that lasts only a few minutes and is described as extremely pleasurable. Oral or intranasal use produces euphoria - a high, but not a rush. Users may become addicted quickly, and use it with increasing frequency and in increasing doses.

**Short-term effects.** The central nervous system (CNS) actions that result from taking even small amounts of methamphetamine include increased wakefulness, increased physical activity, decreased appetite, increased respiration, hyperthermia, and euphoria. Other CNS effects include irritability, insomnia, confusion, tremors, convulsions, anxiety, paranoia, and aggressiveness. Hyperthermia and convulsions can result in death.

**Long-term effects.** Methamphetamine causes increased heart rate and blood pressure and can cause irreversible damage to blood vessels in the brain, producing strokes. Other effects of methamphetamine include respiratory problems, irregular heartbeat, and extreme anorexia. Its use can result in cardiovascular collapse and death.

## **How Dangerous Is It to Teens?**

While meth use in the U.S. has been declining, widespread media coverage about the drug often raises many questions and causes parents to worry about whether their children are exposed to or using this dangerous substance. Meth is a stimulant drug used for the euphoria it produces and for weight loss and increased libido. The down side of the high is addiction and a

variety of toxic short- and long-term effects. One of the most serious and unpleasant side effects is "meth mouth," where the users' teeth rot from the inside out.

**Parents need to talk to their kids about meth and the reality of what it does to the body.** Parents also need to know when their teen might be using meth. Some of the most common signs and symptoms are extremely dilated pupils, dry or bleeding nose and lips, chronic nasal or sinus problems and bad breath. Because meth is a stimulant, users also experience hyperactivity and irritability. This includes a lack of interest in sleep and food, leading to drastic weight loss or anorexia. It may also cause users to be aggressive, nervous, and engage in disconnected chatter.

Some short-term effects are irritability, anxiety, insomnia, Parkinson-like tremors, convulsions and paranoia. Longer-term effects can include increased heart rate and blood pressure, damage to blood vessels in the brain, stroke and even death. Psychotic symptoms can sometimes persist for months or years even after the user has stopped taking the drug.

**Meth use is declining among youth.** The Monitoring the Future study shows that among 8th, 10th, and 12th graders, meth use has declined by 28, 47, and 51 percent respectively in the past three years.

It is important to note that **marijuana is still the single largest drug of abuse in this country** — 15 million current or past month users compared to one million meth current or past month users. **Meth is often in the news because of its dramatic effects and consequences.** Illegal meth labs often explode, creating danger to communities through fires. Meth labs on public lands create dangers to hikers and tourists, and children of meth users are often abandoned or neglected and are flooding the social services systems in many areas. Meth is easily made with common ingredients and readily available household equipment, making it widely and inexpensively available.

Adult methamphetamine addicts often become so obsessed with the drug that they neglect their children. Twenty percent of the meth labs raided in 2002 had children present. In addition to general neglect, children living in meth labs face a variety of dangers including the usual meth lab hazards — fires, explosions and exposure to extremely toxic chemicals. Chronic exposure to meth lab chemicals can damage the brain, liver, kidneys and spleen and can also cause cancer.

**If you suspect a teen in your life is using meth or is exposed to meth, the time for a courageous conversation is now.** Discuss the risks and effects of using this substance. Even without addiction, experimentation is too great a gamble. If something interrupts your conversation, pick it up the next chance you get.

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