

## Do You Know...

**Street name:** speed, meth, chalk, ice, crystal, crystal meth, jib

### What is it?

Methamphetamine belongs to a family of drugs called amphetamines—powerful stimulants that speed up the body’s central nervous system. It has been used medically as a treatment for obesity and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). While still available for medical use in the United States, its use is limited by the severity of its adverse effects, and by its high addictive potential. Methamphetamine is not legally available in Canada.

### Where does methamphetamine come from?

Street methamphetamine is made in illegal labs with fairly inexpensive, and often toxic or flammable, ingredients. The chemicals and processes used vary from lab to lab, affecting the strength, purity and effect of the final product.

# Methamphetamine

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## What does methamphetamine look like?

Methamphetamine is a white, odourless, bitter-tasting crystalline powder that dissolves easily in water or alcohol and may be snorted, swallowed, smoked or injected. In its smokable form, methamphetamine is called “ice,” “crystal,” “crank” or “glass” because of its transparent, sheet-like crystals. It is smoked in a pipe like crack cocaine.

## Who uses methamphetamine?

In the past, illegal methamphetamine use was most closely associated with biker gangs, and also had a spell of popularity in the hippie culture of the 1960s. More recently, the low cost, ease of manufacture and availability of methamphetamine has led to a rise in use among a variety of people. These users include young people at nightclubs and parties, and cocaine users who substitute methamphetamine for its cocaine-like effects.

A 2011 survey of Ontario students in grades 7 to 12 reported that one per cent had used methamphetamine at least once in the past year. A 2012 study estimated that there are roughly 52,000 methamphetamine users in Canada. This same study went on to say that the actual number of users may be much higher.

## How does methamphetamine make you feel?

The way methamphetamine—or any other drug—affects you depends on many factors, including:

- your age and your body weight
- how much you take and how often you take it
- how long you’ve been taking it
- the method you use to take the drug
- the environment you’re in
- whether or not you have certain pre-existing medical or psychiatric conditions
- if you’ve taken any alcohol or other drugs (illicit, prescription, over-the-counter or herbal).

Immediately after smoking methamphetamine or injecting it into a vein, the user experiences an intense surge of euphoria, called a “rush” or “flash.” Snorting methamphetamine produces effects within three to five minutes; swallowing in about 15–20 minutes.

Methamphetamine makes people feel alert and energetic, confident and talkative. They feel little need for food or sleep. On the other hand, users are also likely to feel the many unwanted effects of the drug, including racing of the heart, chest pain, dryness of the mouth, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea and physical tension. Many report an anxious “wired” feeling of restlessness and irritability. The negative effects of methamphetamine can be extreme and alarming, including paranoid delusions, hallucinations, aggressive behaviour and impulsive violence.

## How long does the feeling last?

When methamphetamine is injected or taken by mouth, the effects of the drug last about six to eight hours. Smoking methamphetamine may produce effects that last from 10–12 hours. After the effects of the drug have worn off, users are left feeling tired and depressed. Some use the drug continuously over a period of days or weeks in a “binge and crash” pattern, inviting serious health risks and leading to drug addiction.

## Is methamphetamine addictive?

Yes. Tolerance to the effects of methamphetamine builds up quickly in regular users, meaning they need more and more of the drug to achieve the desired effect. When addicted users stop taking methamphetamine, they have strong cravings for the drug, and within a few days will experience withdrawal symptoms, including stomach pain, hunger, headaches, shortness of breath, tiredness and depression.

## Is methamphetamine dangerous?

Yes. Methamphetamine causes the heart to beat faster and blood pressure to rise. Since what is sold as methamphetamine varies widely in terms of content and purity, users can’t know how much they are taking. An overdose of methamphetamine can result in seizures, high body temperature, irregular heartbeat, heart attack, stroke and death. The risk of overdose is highest when the drug is injected.

Injecting methamphetamine also puts the user at risk of infections from used needles or impurities in the drug, and of hepatitis or HIV if they share needles with others.

Using methamphetamine during pregnancy can cause the baby to be born prematurely and to have a low birth weight.

Driving or operating machinery while under the influence of methamphetamine, or any drug, increases the risk of physical injury to the user, and increases the risk of injury to others.

### What are the long-term effects of using methamphetamine?

When methamphetamine is used regularly over a long period of time, people can develop amphetamine psychosis. The symptoms of amphetamine psychosis include hallucinations, delusions, paranoia and bizarre and violent behaviour.

Regular use of methamphetamine can also result in:

- severe tooth decay (meth mouth)
- meth “bugs,” or the feeling of bugs under the skin, leading to skin-picking and sores
- loss of appetite, weight loss
- difficulty sleeping
- increased risk of heart disease and stroke
- increased risk of Parkinson’s disease.

Research in animals and humans suggests that methamphetamine may cause long-term damage to cells in those areas of the brain associated with thinking, memory and movement. Further research is needed to determine if these effects are permanent.

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