

# methamphetamine



## What is methamphetamine?

Methamphetamine is a powerful upper. The speedy high is similar to cocaine, but unlike cocaine, the effects of this drug can last for up to 12 hours, depending on how it's used. Methamphetamine comes as a powder that can be swallowed, snorted, smoked or injected. It also comes as a crystal form, which is usually smoked. The crystal form is often called "crystal meth" or "tina." Other nicknames for methamphetamine include "speed" or "meth." (Don't confuse this last nickname with methadone, which is also referred to as "meth.")

## What do people like about methamphetamine?

People who use methamphetamine like it because it gives them energy and makes them feel confident, alert and strong for many hours. Some like it because it makes them feel sexy. And some like it because it takes away their appetite and they feel like they don't need to eat.

## Where does methamphetamine come from?

Methamphetamine is made in "backroom" or "home" labs. Not everyone who makes the drug makes it the same way. It's impossible to know how powerful the drug is or what has been used to make it. Some people make it with ingredients from batteries, cleaning fluids and antifreeze, which are poisonous. Taking methamphetamine that was made with toxic chemicals has seriously harmed some people.

## What will it do to me?

Methamphetamine turns on a part of the brain that gives pleasure. It can make you feel great. The problem is that such a powerful drug also has some not-so-great and even dangerous effects. Using methamphetamine, even just once, can:

- Make you feel restless and anxious.
- Cause you to talk non-stop. (It's no fun to be with someone who can't stop talking!)
- Lead you to feel paranoid—like you can't trust the people around you, including your friends. You may become confused, angry and violent.
- Overheat your body. This is especially a risk if you are very active when you are on the drug. People can die if they get too hot.
- Raise your blood pressure. This can cause a stroke or a heart attack, which can disable or kill you.
- Cause you to have a seizure or an abnormal heartbeat. These effects, while rare, can also leave you with heart or brain problems or kill you.
- Cause you to "crash." When you stop using, you feel tired, nervous, hungry, sweaty, depressed and very irritable.

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Using a lot of methamphetamine or using it for a long time can:

- Damage the parts of your brain that control thinking and movement. This can cause memory loss, trouble thinking, depression, shaking and problems with co-ordination.
- Make you see and hear things that aren't there. You may think that people are after you or that bugs are crawling under your skin. This may go on for months or years after you stop using.
- Take away your appetite. Some people become so thin and weak that their bodies have trouble fighting off infections.
- Result in damage to your teeth and gums (often called "meth mouth").
- Lead you to give up friends, family and activities that you enjoy.

### Are there other risks?

If you use needles to take methamphetamine, you risk spreading or catching hepatitis or HIV. Using needles can also let germs enter your body, which can cause infections all over—including in your brain, bones, heart and blood.

### What about sex and methamphetamine?

For some people, sex and methamphetamine go together. The problem is that people who are high on methamphetamine are at greater risk to spread HIV and other diseases because they are:

- More likely to make risky decisions about who they have sex with.
- Less likely to use condoms.
- More likely to have sex that's rougher and that leads to bleeding. Bleeding increases the chance of getting or spreading hepatitis or HIV.
- Less likely to use lube. Methamphetamine makes it hard for the body to produce natural lubrication, which also leads to bleeding.

Some men who use methamphetamine regularly find that they can no longer have an erection.

### Is methamphetamine addictive?

Yes. Even with short-term use, methamphetamine can be addictive.

You may be hooked on methamphetamine if you:

- have built up a tolerance to it—you don't get the same high that you used to get
- feel irritable, depressed or lack energy when you are not taking it
- spend so much time and money getting it that you don't take care of important things in your life (like paying rent or buying food, seeing your friends and family)
- keep thinking about the next time you'll get to use it again
- keep using methamphetamine despite the problems it causes in your life.

### What can I do to be safer when I use methamphetamine?

**Understand the risks.** Methamphetamine can be a dangerous drug.

**Avoid injecting.** If you do inject, remember to clean your skin with alcohol first, and to use a clean needle.

**Don't chase the high.** Using again after the first use won't give you the same high.

**Carry condoms and lube, and practise safer sex.** If you do have high-risk sex, see your doctor as soon as possible. There may be medications you can take to reduce your chances of getting infections.

**Use only with people you know and trust.** When you use methamphetamine, you may become disoriented, paranoid and nervous. Have someone with you who will look out for you if you need help.

**Take breaks and give yourself time to recover.** Drink a lot of fluids and take time out to cool off from dancing or other hot activities. Avoid long runs that go for days and leave you tired, weak and dehydrated.

**Don't mix methamphetamine with other drugs—** especially not other uppers such as cocaine/crack, amphetamines or ecstasy.

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**Get help immediately** if you feel down or depressed after using and think you might harm yourself.

## **I'm hooked. Is there help?**

Yes! Treatment works for problems with methamphetamine. Group or individual counselling, or a stay at a drug treatment centre, helps people cut down or get off methamphetamine completely. If you choose to stay off methamphetamine, try to avoid using other drugs (including alcohol) and keep in contact with your group or counsellor for a long time after you've stopped using.

For more information, see your doctor or contact one of the agencies listed below.

## **Where can I get more help with drugs?**

ConnexOntario Drug and Alcohol Helpline:  
1 800 565-8603

Access CAMH: Call 416 535-8501  
and select option 2

MAARS (Metro Addiction Assessment Referral Service):  
416 599-1448 (in Toronto)

The Works: 416 392-0520  
(a harm reduction service in Toronto)

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