

METHAMPHETAMINE

"Ice," and "CAT"

WHAT IS METHAMPHETAMINE, AND HOW IS IT USED?

Methamphetamine, also known as "speed", "meth", "crystal meth", or "crank," activates certain systems in the brain. The powerful stimulant drug causes exhilaration, increased activity, and decreased appetite for 8 to 24 hours after use. Although there is an initial general sense of well being, "meth" use has been associated with a long list of mental health and physical health problems.

"Meth" may be a crystalized powder, or, in rock form with chips that look like "ice" or glass. Depending on purity, it is usually white or yellow.

Because the drug is produced using over-the-counter drugs, household products and other chemicals, health and law enforcement officials are especially concerned about the growing number of "meth labs." These illegal drug manufacturing labs are often found in remote and rural areas. The labs increase the availability of "meth" to rural youth and adults as well as causing increased crime, fire and public safety risks to communities where they are located.

Methamphetamine is used orally, smoked, snorted, or injected. "Ice" — a slang term for the rock form — is extremely addictive and causes erratic behaviors. Ice (like crack cocaine), is most often heated and the vapors are inhaled. It is especially dangerous because the inhaled chemical enters the blood stream very quickly through the lungs.

Methamphetamine is usually taken in "runs" or binges of continuous use. The days following the run are generally spent sleeping. Users have been known to use "Meth" in

combination with other drugs such as cocaine, crack, marijuana, heroin, and alcohol.

Persons trying to quit using "Meth" may suffer withdrawal symptoms including depression, anxiety, fatigue, paranoia, aggression, and intense cravings for the drug. Chronic "meth" use can cause violent behavior, anxiety, confusion, and insomnia.

WHO USES METHAMPHETAMINE?

Studies suggest that a wide range of people, including both men and women use the drug. Most are in their late teens through early thirties. Use occurs in all socioeconomic levels, but use is higher among blue-collar workers. Many users sell the drug.

"Meth" is also showing up more frequently on the rave scene. A 2001 national study, called Monitoring the Future, found that among twelfth graders nationwide, 6.9% had used methamphetamines during their lifetime, and, 4.1% had used crystal "meth" or "ice."

WHAT ARE THE PHYSICAL EFFECTS?

The effects of Methamphetamine are felt within a range of a few seconds to 20 minutes after using, depending on how it is used. Methamphetamine use typically causes increased blood pressure and an increased heart rate (a "pounding heart"). Irregular heartbeats may also occur after heavy doses. Even low levels of use can damage dopamine-producing cells that are related to feeling of pleasure. This is especially true with chronic use. Very high doses may cause permanent damage to blood vessels in the brain and result in death.

Other physical effects can include dilated pupils, blurred vision, dry mouth, increased breathing rate, severe headache, tremors of the hands and fingers, nausea, heavy sweating, and dizziness. A decrease in appetite may cause rapid weight loss and malnutrition. Other side effects include convulsions, dangerously high body temperature, stroke, and stomach cramps.

WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF METHAMPHETAMINE ON A USER'S BEHAVIOR?

Users report an increase in physical activity, restlessness, and anxiety. They can become very talkative and repeat simple acts. Some users have impaired judgment, impulsiveness, irritability, confusion, and tremors. Some also exhibit jerky movements and suffer from chronic insomnia. At times, hallucinations and paranoia may occur leading to homicidal or suicidal thoughts.

Users can be hard to understand because their thought patterns and speech shift abruptly. Very high doses of the drug may cause "amphetamine psychosis." This may include repetitive behavior patterns, including hallucinations and delusions, and is much like paranoid schizophrenia. Chronic users often have sores on their skin from scratching at "crank bugs" — a common delusion that bugs are crawling under their skin.

Additional problems occur if a user takes alcohol and other depressants to counter the effects of methamphetamine. Use of multiple drugs increases the risk of health damage and overdose.

HOW ADDICTIVE IS METHAMPHETAMINE?

Methamphetamine is very addictive. Tolerance to the drug builds rapidly, requiring higher doses to achieve effects. Some users become addicted after only a few times of use.

Extreme exhaustion often follows a binge of use. This "crash" is accompanied by a strong craving for more of the drug. Chronic use causes both long- and short-term problems such as brain damage, cognitive impairment and memory loss, stroke, paranoia, anorexia, hyperthermia, and violence. Users who engage in unsafe sex or share needles during use are at risk for HIV/AIDS and other diseases such as Hepatitis C.

Symptoms of withdrawal include severe depression, decreased energy, agitation, and anxiety. Users may also have trouble feeling pleasure.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF USING METHAMPHETAMINE DURING PREGNANCY?

Use of methamphetamine during pregnancy has been linked to premature labor, separation of the placenta, and other problems. Babies born to mothers who use methamphetamine during pregnancy appear to be at greater risk for slowed growth, poor feeding habits, and disturbed sleep patterns. They seem to have poor muscle tone, elevated heart rate, and rapid breathing.

The risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) is greater. They tend to be asocial and have trouble bonding. Some babies have tremors and cry for as long as 24 hours at a time. A recent study by the University of Chicago Medical Center suggests that the use of methamphetamine during pregnancy increases the risk of brain damage in male offspring, and could quicken the onset of brain diseases such as Parkinson's. This may be due to the fact that methamphetamine use increases core body temperature more in males than in females. Women who are considering pregnancy, pregnant, or breast-feeding should not use methamphetamines.

LEGAL INFORMATION

Methamphetamine is a Controlled Substance under Michigan and Federal law. Use, possession, delivery, possession with intent to deliver, and manufacture of the drug are all illegal. Penalties include imprisonment and fines.

Penalties are increased if a person eighteen years or older distributes the drug to a person under eighteen, or distributes the drug near school property.

For details on the legal penalties, refer to the Michigan Law Fact Sheet in this series.

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