


THE BASICS

Methamphetamine

Do you know?

- Methamphetamine is a powerful stimulant (a drug that increases energy and alertness).
- It can be smoked in a pipe, snorted, taken by mouth or injected. The smokeable version comes in a powder that looks like granulated crystals or in a rock form known as “ice.” It can also come in pills or capsules.
- Other street names are crystal meth, speed, glass, shards, the lady and krank.
- The effects are felt almost immediately if smoked or injected, in about five minutes if snorted, and in about 20 minutes if taken by mouth. Effects can last up to 12 hours.
- The production of one pound methamphetamine creates five to seven pounds of toxic waste, along with poisonous gas that is released into the atmosphere.

The Environmental Dangers of Meth

Methamphetamine is made in illegal labs and is produced using inexpensive and toxic or flammable ingredients, including household chemicals and solvents. The resulting toxic waste is often disposed of in ways that are extremely damaging to the environment. For example, it may be dumped in fields and rivers or buried.

As well, the “cooking” process can damage homes and buildings so severely that people can’t live in them afterwards. Explosions can occur, causing physical injury to those in the vicinity, including any children.

Short-term Effects

While using a person may:

- feel an intense rush after smoking or injecting
- have more energy and be more alert
- feel extremely happy and excited
- feel less hungry
- have a dry mouth and cracked lips
- have big pupils and rapid eye movements
- have flushed, clammy skin
- have an increased heart rate and blood pressure
- be short of breath
- have trouble speaking
- act aggressively
- feel sick to their stomach and throw up
- be uncoordinated in their movements
- experience serious side effects, including convulsions (severe muscle spasms), dangerously high body temperature and blood pressure, stroke, irregular heart beat and stomach cramps
- die, if the serious side effects above do not receive medical attention

Long-term Effects

After heavy use over a long period of time, a person may experience:

- sores on their bodies from scratching imaginary bugs. (Often, users think there are bugs crawling under their skin).
- damage to the inside of the nose if the drug is snorted
- blurred vision and dizziness

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- feelings of rage
- weight loss, lack of good nutrition
- anxious feelings and the inability to get to sleep
- psychotic episodes (the person does not know what is real and what is not real)
- paranoia (feeling scared or suspicious for no reason)
- hallucinations (seeing and hearing things that are not there)
- inflammation of the heart lining
- damaged blood vessels and skin problems if the drug is injected
- lead poisoning if lead acetate has been used in the production of the drug

Tolerance and Dependence

- People using methamphetamine can become psychologically dependent (they feel they need it) as well as physically dependent (the body needs it).
- Tolerance (a need for more methamphetamine to get the desired effect) builds up the more a person uses it.

Withdrawal Symptoms

- Withdrawal symptoms include depression (feeling sad), anxiety, tiredness, paranoia, and feelings of aggressiveness.
- The user may have an intense desire or craving for more of the drug.
- Other symptoms are dry mouth, headaches, and hunger.
- Psychotic symptoms, where the person does not know what is real, and/or depressive symptoms may go on for months or even years after use is stopped.

Hitting the "Wall"

While the immediate withdrawal symptoms pass quickly, those who want to quit often experience a "wall" period during which nothing seems pleasurable. This period can last six to eight months for a casual user and two to three years for a regular user. Long-term help from people who care (friends, family, counsellors, doctors) is needed during this period.

Other Risks

- Sharing needles can lead to infections such as HIV and hepatitis.
- If used by a pregnant woman, this drug can cause problems for the fetus, such as premature birth, deformities and reflexes that do not develop properly.
- Irreversible damage to blood vessels in the brain can occur, resulting in strokes.
- People can put themselves in risky situations when on this drug (driving while impaired, having unprotected sex, taking unsafe actions which could cause injury).

REMEMBER: A person's experience with any drug can vary. Here are a few of the many things that may affect the experience: the amount and strength of the drug taken, the setting, a person's mood and expectations before taking the drug, gender, overall health, past experience with that drug and whether more than one drug is being used at the same time. Using alcohol and other drugs at the same time can be dangerous.

Sources and For More Information

A Primer of Drug Action, Robert Julien, Henry Holt and Company, 2001.

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Methamphetamine Information (brochure), Vancouver Island Health Authority.

National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) Website: www.niaaa.nih.gov

National Institute on Drug Abuse Website: www.nida.nih.gov

Publishers Group, LLC Website: www.streetdrugs.org

Straight Facts about Drugs and Drug Abuse, Health Canada, 2000. Mayo Clinic F.A.Q. 2002.

Street Drugs: A Drug Identification Guide, Publishers Group, LLC, Plymouth, MN, 2005.

For more information or for help with a drug or alcohol problem: Contact your local Addictions Foundation of Manitoba (AFM) office or visit the website at www.afm.mb.ca. AFM offers a broad range of prevention and rehabilitation services, including harm reduction and abstinence-based programs for alcohol, other drugs and gambling.

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