

Alcohol and Other Drugs

Understanding methamphetamine.

1800 700 514 (Freecall)
unitingvictas.org.au/aod

What is methamphetamine?

Methamphetamine is a strong stimulant which speeds up signals going to and from the brain. It works by effecting chemical messages in the brain called neurotransmitters.

Methamphetamine comes in several forms:

Speed: a powder which can be swallowed, snorted, smoked or injected.

Base: a sticky paste that's stronger than powder.

Ice, crystal meth or shard: clear or translucent crystals which are generally the most potent form and are usually smoked or injected.

'Meth' is a term used for all the forms it comes in.

Common effects include:

- Increased energy and alertness
- A feeling of pleasure or a 'rush'
- Increased sex drive
- A feeling of euphoria and wellbeing
- Increased confidence

Negative effects include:

- Dry mouth
- Grinding teeth and jaw clenching
- Fast or irregular heart rate
- Repetitive actions such as itching and scratching the body
- Decreased appetite
- Increased sweating
- Anxiety and paranoia
- Increased body temperature
- Psychosis or hallucination
- Overdose

Reducing harm

Not everyone who uses meth will develop ongoing issues, but some people can experience serious harm. The more regularly you use, the more issues you may experience.

Methods of use:

Each method of using meth has its own risks. Snorting, smoking or swallowing can be a safer method than injecting. Injecting also has a faster and greater effect, and increases the risks of contracting viruses if sharing equipment.

Each form of meth is different in terms of its purity or strength. Speed is often the lowest purity and crystal meth is usually the form with the highest purity. When you buy illicit substances, the purity can change over time and you can never be sure what the effect will be. The effects of using meth can depend on many factors such as how you take it, how much you take and how regularly you take it.

Combining meth with other substances will increase the risk of overdose, because each drug can mask the effects of the other drugs making it difficult to know how strong the total effect will be.

Ways to reduce harm

- Eat before using and have water handy
- Set limits on how much or how long you'll use for before you use
- If using a new batch, use a little bit and wait before having more
- Try not to use alone – it can be safer to use in a place you know around people you trust
- Avoid sharing equipment to reduce risk of sharing serious blood borne viruses and infections. Use new equipment each time. Learn safer injecting methods including sterilisation, filtering and swabbing. A NSP (Needle and Syringe Exchange Program) can give free help with equipment and safer methods
- If you think you might have sex, have condoms and lube with you and avoid unprotected sex
- Never drive while effected by substances.

Responding to overdose

If someone is showing signs of overdose, call 000 and tell medical staff everything you know about what has been taken. Signs of overdose include:

- Chest pain
- Seizures
- Extreme panic or anxiety
- Rapid heart rate
- Rapid increase in body temperature
- Confusion.

Withdrawal

When you withdraw from meth you can expect a 'crash' at first and then extreme physical exhaustion and anxiety. It can take several days to come down or withdraw. People that have been using regularly or for a long time can find this time particularly difficult. Because of changes in the brain chemistry, withdrawing from meth commonly causes strong cravings, as well as depression, low motivation and extreme tiredness in the short term.

Withdrawal can be different for every person, but symptoms can include:

Severe exhaustion, need for lots of sleep, restlessness, low mood or depression, anxiety, paranoia, irritability, mood swings, increased appetite, strong cravings.

For many people the withdrawal effects will have settled down after 1-2 weeks. Some people will continue to have disruptions to their appetite, sleep and moods. Some people describe difficulty feeling pleasure through the withdrawal phase. For people who have used meth heavily or for a long time, this can continue for much longer. Try to remember the brain is recovering and this can take time. Support from friends and family, or health and Alcohol and Other Drug support services can make a big difference.

Tips for getting through withdrawal:

- Even with a low appetite, try to eat well. Try to have small healthy snacks regularly instead of larger meals
- Difficulty sleeping can effect mood and energy – avoiding caffeine and nicotine can help
- Gentle exercise can help improve mood and sleep. It's also a way to pass the time and distract from cravings.



The future is bright.



Support is available

Negative reports in the media about people who use meth can shape the way society views people who use, and how people who are using think about themselves. Even if you feel bad about your behaviour, know there is non-judgemental support available to help you make changes.

Contacts

If you want to talk to someone about your own or someone else's alcohol or other drug use, you can get more information from these Victorian and Tasmanian state-wide services. If you are located in another state, these contacts will direct you to your local support services:

DirectLine

24/7 service offering counselling, information and referrals.

T 1800 888 236

directline.org.au

Harm Reduction Victoria

Support and information from other drug using peers.

T 03 9329 1500

hrvic.org.au

QUIT

T 13 78 48

quit.org.au

Family Drug and Gambling Help

Victorian support for family members.

T 1300 660 068

sharc.org.au/sharc-programs/family-drug-gambling-help

Drug alerts

health.vic.gov.au/alcohol-and-drugs/drug-alerts

Alcohol Tobacco and Other Drugs Tasmania Service Directory

atdc.org.au/service-directory

Alcohol and Drug Information Service TAS

24/7 service offering counselling, information and referrals.

T 1800 811 994

Uniting would like to thank consumer partners for drawing on their lived experience to contribute to this series of publications.

