



Methamphetamine Fact Sheet

What are Methamphetamines?

Methamphetamine (meth) is one of many drugs in a group called amphetamines, which are central nervous system stimulants, and include such drugs as caffeine and nicotine. Methamphetamine is most commonly called meth, crank, or speed. It's a powerful stimulant that starts as a transparent white powder, which can be snorted. The powder is also often formed into pills to be swallowed, or into a liquid to be injected.

What Do They Do?

Meth stimulates specific chemicals in your brain and nervous system, making you feel energetic, happy, and confident. This usually results in increased activity and decreased appetite. The effects of meth generally last from 6 to 8 hours.

Short Term Effects

Taking meth may cause you to feel restless, anxious, dizzy, confused, and shaky. Some people even feel hostile and violent on this drug. Unfortunately, it's easy to overdose on meth, regardless of how it's taken. Meth can give you seizures, a heart attack, or a stroke, which may lead to death.

Crystal meth can produce the same side effects as well as giving you acne-like sores on your skin, severe stomach pain, convulsions, and headaches. You may also feel depressed and even suicidal.

The effects of alertness and increased energy that meth may give is the reason why many students (cramming for exams) and shift workers (e.g., truck drivers) become dependent on this drug. But it doesn't solve any problems: users of meth may be able to stay awake for a prolonged period, but they often need to sleep for a long time when the effect of the drug wears off, and sleeping patterns can be disrupted for weeks afterwards.

Long Term Effects

Using methamphetamine regularly is dangerous. First, you can become addicted quickly. But regular users may also become easily agitated, violent, anxious, confused, and can have trouble sleeping. They can suffer from paranoia, delusions, and hallucinations in both their vision and hearing. Many meth users experience disturbing hallucinations of insects crawling underneath their skin, which causes them to scratch at themselves, leading to large lesions and skin infections. Sometimes the paranoia brought on by using meth gives users homicidal or suicidal thoughts. It is particularly dangerous to combine meth and

alcohol or other drugs. Using needles to inject meth is very dangerous as sharing needles increases your chances of contracting HIV, the virus that leads to AIDS.

Long-term methamphetamine use can damage the brain. Scientists say that up to half the cells in the brain that produce dopamine and serotonin (important chemicals that help regulate our moods and emotions) can be damaged or destroyed by meth use. New studies are also showing that this brain damage is similar to damage caused by strokes or Alzheimer's disease.

Addiction

You can become quickly addicted to meth, and stopping use of methamphetamine isn't easy. You might feel depressed, anxious, tired, paranoid, or aggressive, all the while experiencing intense cravings for the drug. This often leads to a cycle of "binging" (using the drug a lot) and then "crashing" (feeling depressed and exhausted).

Some people who are addicted to meth continue to function in the world. However, the user's work, family, and social life are often affected by the user's increasingly paranoid, erratic, and sometimes aggressive behaviour, as well as damage to memory and ability to focus.



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