

What is Methamphetamine?

Information for people who use methamphetamine, and their families, who have presented to healthcare facilities in South Australia.

About methamphetamine

Methamphetamine is a type of amphetamine. All amphetamines stimulate the central nervous system.

There are three forms of methamphetamine:

- > Crystal ('ice')
- > Powder ('speed') and
- > Paste ('base', 'wet' or 'meth').

What are the effects of methamphetamine?

People use methamphetamine for the instant feelings of wellbeing, increased confidence, energy, stamina, concentration and sex drive.

Methamphetamine makes people excitable, hyperactive, and talkative; it reduces appetite and sleep.

The less desirable effects of methamphetamine include dry mouth, bad breath, increased heart rate, blood pressure, irritability and restlessness.

What are the harmful effects?

Harmful effects are more likely with the use of higher doses, the use of more potent forms such as crystal, and use by smoking or injecting (rather than snorting or swallowing).

Methamphetamine can cause tremors, irregular breathing, rapid pounding heartbeat, violent or aggressive behaviour, collapse, seizure, stroke, and heart attack.

These effects can be fatal.

Using methamphetamine can cause amphetamine psychosis, especially when methamphetamine is used regularly or in high doses. Amphetamine psychosis can include hallucinations (hearing, seeing or feeling things that are not real), paranoid delusions (imagining things, false beliefs), and bizarre aggressive and violent behaviour. These symptoms often disappear a few days after methamphetamine use stops, but chances are high that it will happen again if methamphetamine is used again.

Long-term use of methamphetamine can cause:

- > weight loss and malnutrition due to reduced appetite and poor diet;
- > mood swings and depression (bad news if you already suffer from depression or anxiety);
- > less resistance to infections, skin problems, tooth decay;
- > sleep problems, and
- > social, legal, financial and emotional problems.

People who inject methamphetamine also risk vein damage and blood-borne viruses such as hepatitis C and HIV.

Dependence or addiction

Using daily, or almost every day, over a period of time, leads to physical and psychological changes to the body.

The body adapts or 'gets used to' having a drug on a regular basis. This is the basis of tolerance. People who are tolerant need more of the drug to achieve the same effects, but increasing the dose also increases the likelihood of undesirable effects. In addition when they stop using, they experience withdrawal.

The key feature of dependence is a loss of control over use. People who are dependent spend a lot of time thinking about drugs, obtaining and using drugs, and recovering from the effects. They find it difficult to reduce or stop drug use, even when they are aware of problems related to their drug use.

Withdrawal

Withdrawal can occur when amphetamine use is stopped or severely cut down.

Common symptoms are:

- > Depression (inactivity, fatigue, altered mood)
- > Increased sleep, but of poor quality
- > Unpleasant dreams
- > Increased appetite
- > Anxiety, agitation, irritability, poor concentration and paranoia
- > Craving.

Symptoms can be intense for the first 10 days and gradually lessen over the next few weeks. Some people report that craving and mood disturbance can linger.

Recovery

As with all forms of dependence, recovery takes time and persistence. Treatment works if you stick with it. Evidence based treatment includes brief interventions, cognitive behavioural therapy, behavioural therapy, contingency based therapy, residential rehabilitation and self-help or mutual support groups.

People who use methamphetamine often have a poor appetite. As their your appetite returns, they should try to eat healthy foods, such as fresh fruit and vegetables, stay away from fatty foods, avoid alcohol and caffeine. Disturbed sleep is common when withdrawing from methamphetamine. Sleep disturbance and cravings are some of the most difficult aspects of methamphetamine withdrawal.

Where can people get help?

There are things you can do to help your recovery – talk to the Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS) 1300 13 1340 any day of the week, between 8:30am and 10pm. ADIS provides:

- > confidential telephone counselling;
- > information for people who use drugs, their family and friends; and
- > referral to treatment and support services.

Or talk to your doctor, or another health worker.

For more information

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Phone: 1300 13 1340
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www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/dassa

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