

METHAMPHETAMINE

(METH)

What is Methamphetamine (meth)?

Methamphetamine, sometimes referred to as crystal, ice, speed, blue, or meth, is a stimulant (upper) that can be used to increase wakefulness. Meth looks like a white crystal or powder and can be used in a variety of ways: inhaling, smoking, snorting, swallowing, or injecting. Although the effects of meth are felt quickly, they last for only a short period of time. This is often referred to as a “binge and crash effect”. During a binge, individuals may forget to eat and drink, which can be dangerous. It is common for people to use meth repeatedly over the course of a few days.

What are the symptoms of meth use?

Meth is a stimulant (upper) that can produce the following short-term effects:

- Increased awareness, wakefulness, and physical activity
- Decreased appetite
- Increased breathing rate
- Fast heart beat that can sometimes be irregular
- Increased blood pressure
- Increased temperature
- Increased sexual arousal

Over time, meth can also lead to the following effects:

- Memory loss and forgetfulness
 - Significant weight loss
 - Severe dental problems
 - Itchiness (this can lead to people scratching and developing skin sores)
 - Anxiety and paranoia
 - Confusion
 - Hallucinations and violent behavior
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How does meth affect the body?

Meth acts as a central nervous system stimulant (upper). Using meth releases a chemical called dopamine in the brain's reward system, leading to feelings of pleasure. Meth use also causes the release of the fight-or-flight hormones that go throughout the body, increasing heart rate and blood pressure. Meth is highly addictive and can lead to intense withdrawal symptoms, including fatigue, craving of more meth, anxiety, depression, and psychosis.

Meth overdoses

Meth can cause significant effects, like heart attack and stroke if taken in large enough doses. Since individuals might use repeatedly over the course of a few days and forget to eat and drink, they can be at risk for significant dehydration.

Call 911 if anyone using meth has any of the following signs or symptoms:

- Chest pain
- Slurred speech
- Agitation
- Shortness of breath

If you know anyone who uses meth, knowing the signs of a stroke can be helpful to make sure they get necessary treatment quickly. Use the **FAST** acronym to help remember the signs of stroke:

- **Face droop:** one side of their face does not move when smiling or talking
- **Arm weakness:** person has difficulty raising or lifting one arm
- **Speech that is impaired:** their words are slurred and hard to understand
- **Time to Call 911**

Knowing the signs of a heart attack is also important. The person may experience the following:

- Chest pain
- Shortness of breath
- Pain in the neck, arm, jaw or stomach

When anyone experiences these severe symptoms, be sure to call 911 as soon as possible.

Fentanyl-Related Overdoses:

There have been reports nationally of meth being contaminated with fentanyl, a strong [opioid](#). Knowing the signs of an opioid overdose can be helpful for anyone who uses meth. To learn how to reverse an opioid related overdose by using naloxone, visit this [page](#).

Safer use strategies for meth

There are many ways individuals can use meth more safely and reduce associated harms. Read below to learn more about general risk reduction tips as it relates to each method of meth use:

- **Snorting Meth**

Snorting is a safer way to use meth compared to injecting. However, it is important to remember that the crystals can damage your nose. Take these steps to have a safer, more pleasant experience.

Reduction tips:

- Cut the crystals as finely as possible
- Make sure the surface where meth is being used is clean.
- Avoid using dollar bills as a snorting tool. Money may contain different bacteria that can lead to illness.
- Never share or reuse the same snorting tool. Use something disposable, such as a clean straw or rolled up paper, and be sure to throw it out immediately after use.
- After snorting, rinse the nose with warm water. A few drops of warm water will help flush or dissolve remaining crystals.
- Use lip balm before/after use to keep skin hydrated.

- **Injecting**

Meth can be injected into the bloodstream by using a needle and syringe. Sharing needles can put you at risk for blood-borne illnesses like HIV and hepatitis C.

Reduction tips:

- Clean the injection site with an alcohol pad
- Use a new, sharp, sterile syringe for each injection. To find out where to access clean syringes, click [here](#).
- Have and use your own paraphernalia.
- Rotate injection sites to avoid infection.
- Be patient and do not rush the injection.
- To learn more about safer injection practices, take a look at this [manual](#).

- **Smoking**

Smoking is a safer way to use meth compared to injecting.

Reduction tips:

- Meth requires a lot of heat to vaporize. Use a strong heating source like a jet lighter and inhale slowly. This can help prevent inhalation of crystals.
- Clean the pipe before use.
- Use your own rubber mouth piece for your pipe or create your own mouthpiece (using tape) to avoid burning your lips.

- Never share paraphernalia.
 - Drink plenty of water to stay hydrated.
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Sex & Methamphetamine

Meth has become increasingly common as a recreational drug used to enhance a sexual experience. This is most common among men who have sex with men (MSM). Safer sex strategies are important in these cases since individuals will have limited inhibitions and could potentially be taken advantage of. Here are some tips:

- Maintain control of the situation and remember that consent can be withdrawn at any time.
 - Trust in your own judgment and comfort.
 - Bring condoms and lubricant with you, and practice safe sex by using both.
 - If going to a party or place where you expect to be sexually active and use meth, use after showing up. Showing up intoxicated can put you at risk for being taken advantage of.
 - Mixing meth with amyl nitrate (poppers) or Viagra increases risk for heart attacks. Avoid using these substances together when possible.
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Where can I learn more?

For questions or more information, visit [resource page](#) or e-mail us at overdose.prevention@phila.gov.

Sources

Drugabuse.gov - Methamphetamine Drug Facts

<https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/methamphetamine>