

What you should know about methamphetamine



Do you use this product? This fact sheet gives you information on the risks involved, the precautions you should take, and the possible effects when you stop using it.

What is methamphetamine?

It's a drug that acts on the central nervous system. It speeds up the heart rate, increases energy levels, and can make you feel very happy (euphoria).

It can be bought on the black market under the names: speed, crystal meth, tina, crystal, ice, crank, etc.

It's made with toxic chemicals.

What forms does it take?

It can be sold as pills (speed), powder, base (soft paste, a bit like wax) or crystals that look like broken glass or grains of salt (crystal meth). These products can come in different colours.



How is it taken?

Methamphetamine can be taken by mouth, snorted, smoked, injected, or inserted into the rectum.



What are the effects and how long do they last?

At low doses, it can increase:

- self-confidence
- the sensation of not needing to sleep
- motivation
- volubility (talking a lot)

It can also decrease appetite and create an intense feeling of euphoria, called a "rush".

Taken at high doses, it can cause a person to:

- > feel aggressive and violent
- > be nervous, anxious, agitated
- > feel that everyone is against them (paranoia)

- > experience symptoms of psychosis: for instance, seeing or hearing things that no one else sees or hears (hallucinations) or having delusions, such as believing they can read people's minds
- > overdose
- > have other health problems (see page 3)

Smoking or injecting the product causes an intense and rapid effect lasting a few minutes. If taken through the nose, the effect is less intense but lasts longer. If taken by mouth, the effect can last up to 12 hours.

Why do people take methamphetamine?

There is no single reason. They may take it out of curiosity, or to have more energy and stay awake, have more self-confidence, feel less shy, feel better after a trauma, be part of a social group, feel accepted, manage their anxiety or depression, or escape from reality.

Methamphetamine, especially in the form of crystal meth, is one of the drugs used for chemsex.

Taking the drug is said to facilitate sexual relations with one or more partners and to increase pleasure. This practice is risky, because there is a tendency to use condoms less. Sexual relations can also be more intense and cause bleeding.



What is the “crash”?

It's like a “hangover” from drinking alcohol. It's usually felt 12 to 24 hours after use. The person can:

- feel very tired
- be irritable, paranoid, and mistrustful
- feel a strong craving for the product

The stronger the dose taken, the greater the crash.

It's best to rest and to eat and drink well, to give the body time to recuperate. Normally, no medical intervention is needed.

What is withdrawal?

This is a state someone might experience when they stop taking a product that they use often. Strongest between the 7th and 10th day after stopping, it usually ends 2 to 4 weeks later. Sometimes it can take longer.

Symptoms include:

- > Strong cravings
- > Loss of sexual desire (libido)
- > Changes in mood and energy level, with irritability, agitation, and anxiety
- > Reduced concentration and attention span
- > Fatigue due to sleep problems (insomnia) or intense dreams
- > Pain throughout the body, headaches
- > Muscle tension
- > Increased appetite

Can a person become addicted?

Yes, and quickly, if the product is taken often, especially by smoking or injection. Being addicted leads to more use and a greater desire to do so.

Moreover, a person can become “tolerant”, such that increased doses are needed to get the same effects.

What are the health risks?

This product causes:

- > Permanent damage to the heart, liver, kidneys, lungs, and brain
- > High blood pressure, which can lead to heart attack, strokes, and death
- > Excessive weight loss
- > Serious dental problems (meth mouth)
- > Skin problems (itching and sores)
- > Early onset Parkinson’s disease
- > Decreased concentration, motivation, and memory
- > Anxiety and depression
- > Insomnia
- > Paranoia, hallucinations, delusions, or violent behaviour



Sharing syringes can also lead to transmission of viruses such as hepatitis C and HIV.

There are also risks of overdosing (see page 4).

What is the danger of taking medications or natural health products?

Some medications (e.g., antidepressants, AIDS medications) and natural health products increase the effects of methamphetamine. The combination can cause serious side effects. Discuss this with your health care provider.

What precautions should I take if I use this product?

Here are some recommendations.

- > **Know the risks.** Learn about them.
- > **Avoid injecting it.** If you do, use less risky techniques. Use sterile equipment and don’t share.
- > **Practice safe sex.** Use condoms and lubricant. If you’ve had high-risk sex, see your doctor right away. He or she will have you tested for STIs. Some medications may reduce your risk of getting infected (e.g., PrEP for HIV).
- > **Use it with people you trust.** Do it with someone who can help you if you become confused, paranoid, or nervous. Try to always buy your product from the same seller. Different lots can be stronger or mixed with other products.
- > **Take breaks and rest.** Drink lots of non-alcoholic beverages and go out into the fresh air after dancing or other activities. Don’t spend several days using it (*bingeing*). This will make you tired, weak, and dehydrated. Eat before using, because methamphetamine curbs the appetite.
- > **Don’t combine it with other drugs.** This greatly increases the risk of overdosing and health risks.
- > **Ask for help right away** if you feel depressed after using and think you could harm yourself.



What are the signs of overdose?

Methamphetamine overdoses can cause heart, liver, or kidney problems, excessively high body temperature, chills, severe agitation, psychosis, seizures (contractions of certain muscles or of the whole body). They can also lead to coma and even death.

As with any drug, the product may contain other substances, such as fentanyl. If so, there is a risk of opioid overdose.

Signs of overdose are:

- difficult, slow, or irregular breathing
- sounds as if you were choking: gurgling or snoring
- blue lips or fingernails
- very small pupils
- cold, clammy skin
- dizziness and confusion
- very strong desire to sleep (drowsiness)
- lack of response to noise or pain

What to do in case of an overdose?

> If you're able to react:

- If the overdose is due to an opioid, take the antidote (naloxone). It's free and available at the pharmacy without a prescription. The pharmacist will show you how to use it.



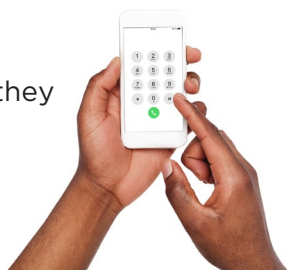
CAUTION

Naloxone should only be taken to treat an overdose. Never take it to relieve a side effect.

- Call **9-1-1** or go to a hospital emergency room as soon as possible.

> If you're unable to react, someone close to you should:

- Call **9-1-1**.
- Give you naloxone as they have learned to do.



Who can I contact for help or to ask question?

You can contact a member of your health care team or your pharmacist.



USEFUL RESOURCES

Drugs - Help and Referral: Support, information, etc., for people with substance use problems.

> aidedrogue.ca/en

Institut national de la santé publique: Administering naloxone in an emergency.

> inspq.qc.ca/en

Type "naloxone" into the search field → Naloxone administration.

RÉZO Montréal:

Resources on LGBTQ men's health and wellness issues (French only).

> rezosante.org

Crystal Meth Anonymous Montréal:

Support for men and women who want to stop using methamphetamine.

> en.cmamtl.org

Other health sheets published by the CHUM are available. Ask for those that might fit your situation.



You can also find them on our website

> chumontreal.qc.ca/fiches-sante

The content of this document in no way replaces the recommendations and diagnoses made, or the treatment suggested by your health professional.

To find out more about the Centre hospitalier de l'Université de Montréal
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