

Jay's story

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I'd seen all the stories in the news about ice sending you crazy and stuff, but I knew a lot of people who took it and they weren't like that at all. One of my mates used it to stay awake for hours doing shift work. Another used it a couple of times a month when she went out partying and seemed to have it under control. When I tried it, it just felt like the best drug I had ever taken! I felt in control, full of energy, confident... I could get so much done! I'd start on Saturday afternoons – have a smoke, clean my house and get everything ready for the next week, then get ready to go out for a big night. Sundays were always a write-off as I wouldn't get home until lunchtime, then would just crash out and try to recover enough for work the next day. Sometimes, if I was feeling really seedy on a Monday morning, a small pipe would just level me off and give me the energy I needed to get through the day. But it all gradually started to snowball – I'd start my weekends on Friday evenings and use constantly for a couple of days. I'd started needing a pipe most mornings to get going and it started to feel like things were getting a bit out of control.

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Methamphetamine

Facts

about



Facts about Methamphetamine

What is meth? Sometimes it can be hard to separate fact from sensationalism. It can be confusing or overwhelming, especially for families and friends who don't know what to believe, what effect the substance use will have on their loved one, and what they can do to help them.

Methamphetamine is a stimulant. It speeds up messages going to and from the brain and targets the neurotransmitters dopamine (which affects pleasure and feelings of 'reward'), serotonin (which regulates mood, appetite and sleep) and noradrenaline (which impacts aggression and anger). There are many different forms of amphetamine, including some found in medications, but the type most commonly used in Australia is methamphetamine. Australia has one of the highest uses of methamphetamine in the world.

Methamphetamine can come in several different forms – speed (a powder which is generally less potent than other forms of methamphetamine and is usually swallowed, snorted, smoked or injected), base (a sticky, gummy paste that is stronger than speed) and ice/crystal meth (clear or translucent crystals that are generally the most potent form of methamphetamine and usually smoked or injected).

People say meth makes them feel euphoric, full of energy and very social, and that they often find themselves more sexually aroused than usual. Their need to eat and sleep reduces and they can generally stay awake for long periods of time. Larger or frequent doses can lead to feelings of paranoia, hallucinations and in more extreme cases prolonged use can lead to heart attack or seizure.

After use, people experience a 'crash' period, during which their body needs to recover from lack of food and sleep. Their brain is lacking dopamine, and they may feel extremely exhausted, depressed and irritable.

Reducing the harms

The use of methamphetamine can lead to a number of negative impacts. Some can be fixed by rest and taking a break. Others can have long-term or even permanent effects. While the easiest way to avoid harm from methamphetamine use is to not use it, if you do choose to use, there are ways to reduce possible harm. Here are a few:

Methods of use

Each method of using methamphetamine carries different risks:

- The vapours caused by smoking can damage your lungs and teeth. Hold the end of the pipe behind your teeth, rinse your mouth frequently between hits and don't hold a hit in your lungs. Don't share pipes – if someone does have cracked or burnt lips, there is a risk of sharing blood particles and the possibility of passing on blood borne viruses (BBVs) such as HIV and Hep C.
- As with other drugs, sharing injecting equipment or injecting methamphetamine in an unsafe way can result in HIV, Hep C, vein damage, infections and scarring. Always use new, sterile equipment and don't share it with anyone else. When injecting ice, it's a good idea to use more water in the mix to avoid the solution acting as an irritant. Always wash your hands in warm soapy water before and after injecting.
- Snorting or swallowing are less harmful methods of use, but as ice crystals have jagged edges, it can cause pain and damage to the delicate mucus membranes in your nose. If you are going to snort it, crush it as finely as possible to minimise damage. Remember not to share noses/straws with people if you are snorting – you can still pass on BBVs this way.

Use less and use less often

- Reducing the amount and frequency of your use will reduce the risk of experiencing consequences such as dependence, depression, anxiety and psychosis.

Plan ahead

- Think about how it's going to affect you and prepare ahead to reduce risk and cope with the 'crash'. Make sure you are rested and have eaten well before you use. Avoid using when you are sick. Plan to have some time to rest and recover after using. Make sure you have healthy food ready.

Pay attention to your body

- Remember to keep yourself hydrated (with water, not alcohol) and to eat regularly (even when you don't feel hungry). Doing this while you're using will help reduce the 'crash'. It's also important to take regular time out to rest and allow your body to recover between sessions.

Look after your mental health

- Methamphetamine use can put your body under a lot of stress and exacerbate any existing mental health problems. Regular use of large amounts also carries a high risk of experiencing symptoms of psychosis e.g. hearing, seeing or feeling things that aren't there or feeling a distorted sense of reality. This is usually temporary (and disappears after you stop using), but can also lead to ongoing symptoms and the development of new mental health problems.

Watch out for overdose

- Methamphetamine overdose fatalities are rare. However, high doses can cause irregular heartbeat, respiratory failure, hyperthermia (overheating), seizures and in extreme cases, stroke and heart failure. Warning signs include intense headaches, chest pain, fever or tremors. If someone is experiencing any of these symptoms, seek help straight away.