

Dale's story

// The first couple of times I tried to get treatment it was a disaster. The first time I went into a residential detox, I was coming off a 4 day binge and I was like a zombie! They wanted me to go to group sessions, I wanted to sleep. I was getting more and more agitated. In the end I only lasted a few days before I stormed out. I tried to see a counsellor afterwards but I kept missing appointments – my routines were all over the place and it was too hard to remember when I was supposed to be doing things. But eventually I was told by the courts that if I didn't get treatment I'd be going to jail, so I'm giving it another try. I've started another detox, but I can see some changes in their approach. For the first few days, they let me just sleep and eat. Now I feel like I can start listening to what they're saying. The cravings are like nothing I've ever had before (and I've come off lots of different drugs), and they're telling me it could take a couple of years for my brain to settle down. But it feels like something's changing this time – I'm ready to get back in control.

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Thanks to ReGen's Consumer Consultants and Harm Reduction Victoria for their contributions to the development of ReGen's drug information leaflets.



Methamphetamine

Getting support

 **UnitingCare**

Re Gen

Getting started

Not everyone who uses methamphetamine goes on to develop problems, but some people do. Those who do (particularly those using crystal meth) typically experience serious harm.

What happens if you think your methamphetamine use is getting out of control? How do you know if it's a problem? What will people think if you ask for help? It can feel overwhelming, but there are a number of different options available, including just talking to someone about where you're at and asking for advice. The first thing to remember is that by recognising some of the reasons you want to change, you've already started on your journey.

Changing your methamphetamine use

When you use methamphetamine regularly or for a long period of time, your body adapts and becomes used to its presence. Dependence occurs when you don't feel 'normal' without methamphetamine.

While there's no simple 'cure' that will stop you feeling like you want to use methamphetamine, there are different treatment options available that can help you make long-term change. Talk to your doctor or local alcohol and other drug service about which options will help you get to where you want to be.

First up will be a period of withdrawal - clearing the methamphetamine from your system after you've stopped using and giving your body a chance to adapt to the change. Developing new skills and changing your thought processes and patterns of behaviour takes longer than withdrawal, but will help you avoid a relapse in the future.

Withdrawing from methamphetamine

Most people experience a 'crash' period when they stop using methamphetamine. This usually lasts a few days. Generally people do not need medical support during this time, however people who have been using methamphetamine regularly or for a long time can find it particularly hard. Due to the changes in their brain chemistry, they can experience intense cravings during their withdrawal period, as well as extreme tiredness, depression and lack of motivation.

Withdrawal symptoms you may experience

Everyone experiences withdrawal differently but common symptoms of methamphetamine withdrawal include severe exhaustion and need for sleep, strong cravings, flat mood/depression and/or restlessness, anxiety & paranoia, decreased energy and motivation, mood swings/irritability, increased appetite and sleep disturbance/insomnia.

After about a week and a half, most symptoms will start to settle down, with some people still experiencing mood swings, irritability and restlessness. Continuing poor sleep and feeling run down can lead to feelings of tiredness and lack of energy, and some people report they find it hard to feel pleasure, even from usually enjoyable activities.

After the first month symptoms start to disappear, but people who had been using methamphetamine heavily can feel ongoing symptoms like depression or difficulty with motivation and planning for months or even years.

Tips for getting through withdrawal

There are a number of things you can do to support yourself through the withdrawal process:

- Drink plenty of water or juice, and steer clear of greasy foods that may trigger nausea. Eat small healthy snacks & meals regularly throughout the day.

- Accept that sleep might be more difficult than normal – doing some gentle exercise during the day and then some relaxation exercises before bed can help you to wind down and feel tired enough to sleep. Your doctor may also be able to provide medication or suggest herbal remedies.
- Avoid or cut down on your use of caffeine and nicotine, as these will make it harder to sleep.
- Go easy on yourself! Most people have good days and bad days during withdrawal. Expect to feel strong cravings at times, as well as mood swings, feeling overwhelmed and feeling like it's all just too hard. Try and surround yourself with people who understand what you're trying to do and who will be encouraging and supportive.
- Monitor any symptoms of depression. If they are not improving, go and see your GP. You may need some extra support or medication to help you through this period.

What comes after withdrawal?

Withdrawal is an essential part of the process but, on its own is no guarantee of ongoing success. Changing your thought processes and how you respond to different situations takes longer. Counselling, rehabilitation services or support groups can help with this.

Your brain may take some time to recover from your methamphetamine use, and you may feel forgetful and disorganised (or have trouble concentrating) for a while. This is not your fault – make sure those around you know to expect this and support you to develop new routines and recover brain function.

The more work you do on developing your skills to build on the changes you've made and the stronger your support network is, the better you'll be able to cope with the various challenges you'll face and achieve your goals.