

# METHAMPHETAMINE

## Ways to Stay Safe

NOT FOR GENERAL DISTRIBUTION

## ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

This booklet contains practical information about methamphetamine including tips for safer use and advice for people who want to cut back or quit.

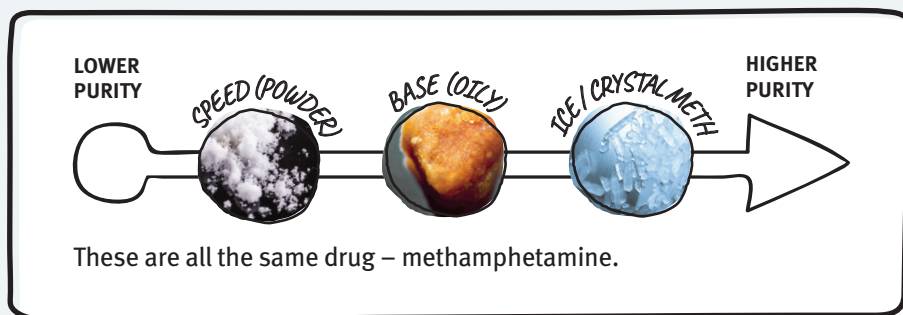
If you need specific information on the issues covered in this booklet you should contact your local alcohol and drug service or your GP.

## WHAT IS METHAMPHETAMINE?

*(Meth, Ice, Crystal, Shard, Speed, Base, Goey, Fast, Whizz, Tina, P...)*

- Methamphetamine is a powerful stimulant drug.
- It can produce a sense of well-being and increase alertness and energy.
- Effects can last between 4-24 hours. The strength of the effect depends on the amount you use, how often you use it, how you take it and other individual factors such as your age, weight and body type.

There are different types of meth:



There are also prescription medications that contain amphetamine or amphetamine-like substances (e.g. Ritalin, Dexamphetamine).

## HOW IT WORKS

- Methamphetamine primarily works by releasing a large amount of the reward chemical 'dopamine' into the brain, as well as other neurotransmitters called noradrenaline and serotonin.
- These brain chemicals also suppress appetite and the urge to sleep.
- The more regularly you use meth, the less you feel the effects of dopamine, and the harder it is for your body to produce dopamine naturally.

## REASONS FOR USE

People use meth for lots of different reasons. For example, some people use it to help stay awake or concentrate, some use it to enhance their enjoyment of parties and events, while others use it to cope with stress or to deal with personal issues or problems in their lives.

*WHAT ARE THE REASONS WHY YOU USE METH?*

**TIP:** It's helpful to understand why you use meth as it can affect where, when, how much and how often you might use it.

## PATTERNS OF USE

Most people who use meth take it occasionally or at certain situations and events. A smaller number of people find themselves using it more regularly.



Some people who use meth can find it hard to stop. If you find that you are:

- Spending a great deal of time getting, using, or recovering from the effects of meth;
- Using meth in greater amounts, or for longer than you originally planned;
- Continuing to use meth despite experiencing problems, or are;
- Needing a lot more of the drug to feel the same effect...

**It might be a sign that you are 'dependent' on meth.**

*TIP: THE MORE FREQUENTLY YOU USE METH, THE MORE PROBLEMS YOU MAY EXPERIENCE.*

*THERE IS NO SAFE LEVEL OF METH USE.*

## TOP TIPS TO STAYING SAFE

There are particular risks and harms associated with using meth, regardless of whether you are experimenting with it or using it more regularly.

### Before using – plan ahead

- Eat first.
- Set limits about how much and for how long you will use.
- Take into account the purity of the form of meth you are using.
- New batch? Use a little bit first and wait before having more.
- Try not to use alone. Use around people you trust in a safe place.
- Have water handy.
- Be safe sex ready (condoms and lube).
- Have a ‘buddy’ system. This is where you and a friend look out for each other and keep each other safe.
- Plan not to drive. Meth affects your ability to drive safely. It’s also against the law.

### Bad Reactions

If after using meth you feel:

- Uncomfortable
- Agitated
- Anxious
- Headache
- Nausea
- Hot / Sweaty.

It may be a sign that you’ve had too much. Find somewhere quiet to relax until some of the effects wear off.

*MAKE SURE SOMEONE STAYS WITH YOU. DRINK WATER. IF YOU'RE WORRIED SEEK MEDICAL HELP.*

### Responding to overdose

Signs that someone has overdosed on methamphetamine include:

- Severe headache
- Confusion and/or disorientation
- Chest pain
- Vomiting or nausea
- Rapid heart rate
- Rapid increase in body temperature
- Irregular breathing
- Abnormally high blood pressure
- Extreme anxiety, panic or aggression
- Seizures
- Falling unconscious.

**IF THIS HAPPENS TO YOU OR SOMEONE YOU KNOW, GET HELP IMMEDIATELY. CALL ‘000’ AND ASK FOR ‘AMBULANCE’.**  
**Tell the ambulance officers and other medical staff exactly what has been taken.**

If someone is unconscious and breathing, turn them on their side. If they are not breathing, perform CPR if you are able to. Wait with them until help arrives.

## WAYS OF USE...

Injecting is the most risky way of using meth, followed by smoking. Swallowing, snorting and rectal administration (shafting) still carry risks.

### Tips for Injectors

- Don't inject alone.
- Always wash your hands first with soap and water.
- Always use new sterile equipment (needles, syringes, water, spoons, swabs, filters and any other injecting equipment). Use the correct equipment for what you are injecting.
- Never share equipment.
- Mix up with plenty of sterile water. If you can't get sterile water, use the following options in this order of preference:
  1. boiled water that has been allowed to cool to room temperature;
  2. tap water;
  3. still bottled water (not sparkling).
- Always use a filter, even if your mix looks totally clear. Don't reuse filters.
- Before injecting, swab the injection site with an alcohol swab – swab in one direction, once.
- Rotate your injecting sites to avoid scar tissue.
- Inject towards the heart.
- Dispose of all injecting equipment safely in a rigid, puncture-proof container.

*PLEASE NOTE: SMOKING METH CAN RAPIDLY LEAD TO DEPENDENCE.*

*YOUR LOCAL NEEDLE AND SYRINGE PROGRAM (NSP) CAN PROVIDE YOU WITH SAFE INJECTING ADVICE AS WELL AS CLEAN EQUIPMENT.*

*TIP: VEINS CAN SHRINK WHEN YOU USE METHAMPHETAMINE, MAKING THEM HARDER TO FIND, WHICH IN TURN CAN LEAD TO MISSES, VEIN DAMAGE AND ABSCESSSES. CONSIDER TRYING OTHER, LESS RISKY WAYS OF USING METH.*

### Tips for Smokers

- It's easy to have too much when you smoke pipes. Wait a while between pipes.
- Pack your gear away after use to avoid smoking pipe after pipe.
- Let the pipe cool down between use to avoid getting blistered or cracked lips.
- Avoid sharing pipes to reduce risk of infection.



## TROUBLE SLEEPING?

Using meth can affect both the amount and quality of sleep you get.

### Top tips:

- Before using meth, make sure you have a safe, comfortable and quiet place to 'crash' for when the time comes, preferably stocked with good food and drink.
- While using, try to have some downtime or a break from physical activity.
- Know when it's time to take a break from using. Don't ignore tiredness. Go to bed when your body tells you it's ready.
- Try to maintain a good sleep routine. Avoid getting into a pattern of staying up all night and then sleeping all day.
- If you are struggling to get to sleep, try a warm shower or have a warm, milky drink (milk contains a sleep-enhancing amino acid). Try relaxation exercises such as consciously relaxing every part of your body, starting with your toes and working your way up your body to your head.
- Be aware of taking alcohol, opiates and benzodiazepines (e.g. Valium / sleeping pills) to help you sleep. There is a risk of overdose from these drugs once the meth wears off.

*TIP: IF YOU ARE HAVING TROUBLE SLEEPING, IT MIGHT BE A SIGN THAT YOU NEED TO CUT BACK YOUR USE.*



## FEELING UNHEALTHY?

Methamphetamine suppresses your appetite, causing some people to worry about their diet, weight and appearance.

### Top tips:

- Eat before using, and remember to eat at least one meal each day.
- Try not to rely on takeaway and junk food. These might be quick and easy, but may not have the nutritional value your body needs to stay strong.
- Try to get a balanced diet that includes protein (meat, fish, chicken, beans, soy products), vegetables, fruit, cereals and dairy products.
- Having trouble eating? Try things that are easy to swallow and are good for you such as fruit, smoothies, yoghurt, cereal + milk, soup and pasta.
- Stay hydrated. Drink water and/or milk. Limit the amount of alcohol you drink and/or try lower-strength alcohol. Have a glass of water between each drink of alcohol.
- Methamphetamine can dry out your mouth, which can cause teeth and gum problems. Brush your teeth every day. If you grind your teeth, try chewing gum. Long term grinding can damage or crack your teeth.
- Don't pick at your skin – this can cause or spread infection.
- Have regular showers and look after your personal hygiene.
- Have regular check-ups with your GP, dentist, sexual health clinic etc.

## *MIND YOUR HEAD*

Some people who use meth can experience anxiety, low mood or feel ‘scattered’, particularly if you have been using for a couple of days. If you experience these things, it’s probably a sign that it’s time to take a break and catch up on some sleep. If you can’t sleep, stay calm and find a safe place to relax.

**Remember, if you are already feeling sad, angry or anxious, or have an existing mental health issue, using meth can sometimes make these things worse, particularly when you’re coming-down.**

## *PSYCHOSIS*

Some people start to see, hear or feel things that aren’t there, or think that people are out to get them. This could be a sign of psychosis.

Feeling psychotic can make you vulnerable or do things that you wouldn’t normally do.

These feelings are usually temporary. If they don’t go away after you have had a good sleep, seek professional help.

Look for warning signals. The sooner you get help for psychosis the better the outcome.

*PLEASE NOTE: IF YOU’RE ALREADY FEELING ANXIOUS OR PARANOID, SMOKING CANNABIS MAY MAKE THESE THINGS FEEL WORSE.*

## *CONCERNED ABOUT A RELATIONSHIP?*

Using meth can affect your relationships with partners, children, family members, friends and work colleagues, particularly if it is causing changes to your mood, behaviour, finances or how you spend your time.

### *TIP: IS THERE SOMEONE IN YOUR LIFE WHO YOU TRUST*

– like a family member, friend or worker – who you can talk to about your meth use?

## *ARE YOU A PARENT?*

Avoid using meth while children are in your care. Ensure your children remain safe and supervised at all times. Be prepared for the come-down.

## *ARE YOU EXPECTING?*

Avoid using meth while pregnant. Meth use during pregnancy is linked to higher rates of miscarriage, premature delivery, birth defects and other complications. Talk to a medical professional for advice as soon as possible.

## *WANT TO CUT DOWN OR QUIT?*

While many people can quit or cut back their use of methamphetamine all by themselves, some find it easier with help from family, friends and/or health professionals.

There is no one way of changing – everyone is different and it's important to think about what works for you.

If you use regularly, know what to expect when you cut down. Symptoms of withdrawal (low mood, anxiety, poor sleep, cravings, irritability) may be unpleasant, but will lessen over time.

Remember, you can sometimes feel worse before you feel better. If you have been a heavy user it can sometimes take weeks or months to experience the benefits of cutting back or quitting. Stick with it and be patient. Having extra support for a while can help if it feels difficult

getting motivated, organised or remembering things.

Things that can help are sleeping well, eating healthy, doing exercise, avoiding 'triggers' (i.e. things that make you think about using meth) and getting active by doing things like sport, hobbies, interests, social activities etc.

### *REMEMBER:*

- Help is available.
- Treatment works.
- People can make successful changes around their meth use.
- If you are trying to quit, sometimes it can take a few attempts. Learn from any slip-ups and keep going.

## *WHERE TO GO FOR MORE HELP...*

The Alcohol and Drug Information Service is a free, confidential, 24 hour telephone service for Queensland residents.

**1800 177 833**

Your local Alcohol and Drug Service:

This resource has been developed by Insight Clinical Support Services. To download additional copies visit [www.insightqld.org/meth-check](http://www.insightqld.org/meth-check) This initiative is part of Queensland Health's response to 'ice' crystal methamphetamine.

**QAIHC QISMC**

