



What is methamphetamine?

Methamphetamine is one of the amphetamine group of drugs, which are all manufactured from readily available chemicals. Methamphetamine is a stimulant drug. Stimulants speed up the function of the brain and nervous system. Methamphetamine is available in three different forms commonly known as speed, base and ice.

Variations in the methamphetamine structure produce other drugs and MDMA (methylene dioxy methamphetamine) or ecstasy is the best known example. For more information see Ecstasy Drug Facts.

Sometimes, but not often, doctors prescribe amphetamine drugs to treat particular health problems. But mostly people use amphetamine that is made illegally. Most of these drugs currently sold on the street in Australia are methamphetamine or variants that are stronger than amphetamines.

Forms of methamphetamine

Speed, base and ice are all the same drug, methamphetamine, but they differ in their purity. Ice is about 80 per cent pure, whereas speed is typically around 10 to 20 per cent pure. The purity of ice makes the effects stronger and longer lasting but also makes it more addictive with worse side effects.

Speed

Speed usually comes in the form of white or yellow powder, but can also be bought as pills. People either sniff it through the nose

(snort it), inject it or swallowed it in tablet or capsule form. Speed is also known as go-ee, whiz, rev and uppers. People who sell speed often mix or cut the powder with other things that look the same, to make the drug go further. Some mixed-in substances can have unpleasant or harmful effects. It is difficult to tell what the drug actually contains.

Base

Base is a damp or oily substance with a white to yellow or brown colour which is more pure than powder. It can vary a lot in its appearance and is also known as pure, paste and wax. Base is usually injected but sometimes swallowed. It isn't commonly used in Australia.

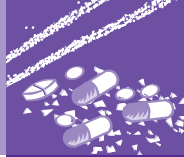
Ice

Ice is the purest form of methamphetamine available in Australia. It usually looks like colourless to white crystals, or a coarse crystal-like powder. It can also appear in other colours. Ice is also called crystal, crystal meth, meth or shabu.

Ice is usually smoked or injected. A drug that is smoked or injected enters the brain more quickly which makes it much more addictive. Ice is also sniffed through the nose (snorted), swallowed or inserted into the anus (shafted).

Because of its purity, ice is more powerful than speed and base and a given amount puts a greater strain on the body. Its use can therefore be much more dangerous. It has stronger side effects and a worse comedown.





Effects

What methamphetamine does to you depends on:

- how much you take and how pure it is
- your height and weight
- your general health
- your mood
- your past experience with speed
- whether you use methamphetamine on its own or with other drugs
- whether you use alone or with others, at home or at a party, etc.

The immediate and long-term effects of all types of methamphetamine are the same. Because ice is a more potent or purer form of methamphetamine, all the effects and side-effects will be more likely to happen and be more intense than with speed or base.

Immediate effects

Small amounts

When you take a small amount of methamphetamine the effects can last from a few hours to a few days.

You may:

- feel very good and confident
- feel alert and energetic
- be excited or agitated
- talk a lot
- feel aggressive
- feel anxious or panicky
- take more risks than usual.

Effects on your body may include that:

- your heart beats faster
- you breathe faster
- you feel less hungry
- your blood pressure rises
- the pupils in your eyes get bigger
- you move more quickly
- it is hard to sleep.



Large amounts

If you take a large amount of methamphetamine you might:

- get headaches
- feel dizzy
- feel restless
- shake
- have irregular breathing
- have a very fast or irregular heartbeat
- become pale
- feel very powerful or better than others
- become hostile or aggressive
- have psychosis — a serious psychological problem where you hear voices, imagine things, and/or fear that others want to hurt you.

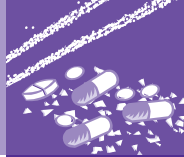
Long-term effects

If you use methamphetamine often and for a long time you may:

- become dependent on the drug (see 'Tolerance and dependence', page 3)
- often become violent for no reason
- get sick more often because your body can't resist disease properly
- be upset or depressed
- have periods of psychosis
- have relationship, work, money, legal or housing problems.

The way a person takes methamphetamine over a long time can also cause problems such as:

- Snorting the drug can lead to nosebleeds, sinus problems and damage inside the nose.
- Injecting the drug with used or dirty needles or other equipment makes you more likely to get infected with hepatitis C, hepatitis B and/or HIV, get blood poisoning (septicaemia) and skin abscesses (sores with pus).
- Injecting the drug over a long time can result in:
 - blocked blood vessels (caused by the drug constricting your blood vessels or by the things sometimes mixed with 'speed') leading to serious damage to the body's organs such as the liver, heart, kidneys
 - inflamed blood vessels and abscesses.
- Injecting and snorting amphetamine type substances also increases the risk of becoming dependent on the drug and of getting other health problems.



Overdose

Overdose of methamphetamine can happen to anyone. Even small amounts may cause overdose with some people who have an especially strong reaction to it.

When a person overdoses, it may cause:

- methamphetamine psychosis
- faster, irregular or weak heartbeat
- heart attack
- bleeding blood vessels in the brain
- very high fever
- death (rarely).

Mixing speed, base or ice with other drugs

People who use methamphetamine sometimes take other drugs at the same time to cope with some of the things methamphetamine does to the body. Some people take drugs such as minor tranquillisers, alcohol, marijuana or heroin to help them sleep.

This can make you dependent on several drugs at once. For example, some people need speed or ice each day to get them going and minor tranquillisers each night to get to sleep. This type of dependence can lead to many serious physical and psychological problems. Mixing different drugs can also make you more likely to overdose.

Methamphetamine and pregnancy

Using methamphetamine when you are pregnant may increase the chance of losing the baby before it is born or having the baby too early as well as other problems. Babies of mothers using speed, base or ice may weigh less and may get withdrawal symptoms from the mother's methamphetamine use. Little is known about the long-term effects on the child as it grows.

Tolerance and dependence

Anyone can develop a tolerance to speed, base or ice. Tolerance means that you must take more of the drug to feel the same effects you used to have with lower amounts.

Dependence on a drug such as methamphetamine means that it takes up a lot of your thoughts, emotions and activities. You also have trouble cutting back on your drug use even though it is

causing you problems. Dependence on speed, base or ice can lead to a variety of health, money, legal, work and relationship problems. Not all people who use methamphetamine are dependent.

Withdrawal

People who are dependent on speed, base or ice may find it very hard to stop using or cut down because of withdrawal symptoms.

These can include:

- tiredness
- hunger
- chest pains
- feeling confused, anxious or agitated
- weight loss
- deep depression (feeling very down or sad)
- being nervy or restless
- feeling angry or upset
- long but disturbed sleep
- wanting the drug very badly (cravings).

These symptoms are usually fairly short-lived and most withdrawing people don't need medication. However, if you are worried about withdrawal, contact your doctor or health centre.



Methamphetamine and the law

Using speed, base or ice is illegal. If you use, sell or give these drugs to someone else and get caught, you could face substantial fines and penalties including a prison sentence.

Methamphetamine and driving

Methamphetamine can make you feel more confident when you drive. This can make you take dangerous risks and have accidents. It is illegal to drive under the influence of drugs, including speed, base and ice. If you break this law you could lose your license for a set time, or be fined or sent to prison.



Since January 2007, police have been conducting random roadside drug testing and can give any driver a roadside oral drug test. If you test positive you won't be charged immediately but you will be prohibited from driving for 24 hours. The sample is sent to a laboratory and if it tests positive to methamphetamine or other drugs you will be charged to appear in court.

Even where random roadside drug testing is not being carried out, if a police officer suspects you

have used drugs you could be arrested and taken to a hospital for a blood and urine test. The samples will be sent to a laboratory and if they test positive to methamphetamine or any other drug (including prescribed drugs) NSW Police will decide whether your driving would have been impaired by your drug use. You will then be charged accordingly.

Anyone under the influence of speed, base or ice who kills or injures another person while driving can be sentenced to a term in prison.

Information and advice

24 hour confidential telephone counseling service

NSW

Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS)

Tel. (02) 9361 8000

**Toll free.* 1800 422 599

Victoria

Direct Line

Tel. (03) 9416 1818

**Toll free.* 1800 888 236

Western Australia

Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS)

Tel. (08) 9442 5000

**Toll free.* 1800 198 024

Queensland

Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS)

Tel. (07) 3837 5989

**Toll free.* 1800 177 833

South Australia

Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS)

Tel. (08) 8363 8618

**Toll free.* 1300 131 340

Northern Territory

Amity Community Service

Tel. (08) 8944 6565

**Toll free.* 1800 684 372

Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS)

**Toll free.* 1800 131 350



Tasmania

Alcohol and Drug Information Service

**Toll free.* 1800 811 994

ACT

Alcohol and Drug Program

Tel. (02) 6207 9977

** Toll free numbers are only available if you are calling from within that state.*

You will find a copy of this sheet at:

www.communitybuilders.nsw.gov.au/drugs_action/factsheets_index.html

Further copies are available from the Better Health Centre
Tel. (02) 9816 0452 TTY. (02) 9391 9900

Other publications in this series include Alcohol, Marijuana, Hallucinogens, Heroin, Ecstasy, Cocaine and Benzodiazepines.

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