



Methamphetamine

(speed, whiz, base, paste, ice, go-ee, shabu, crystal, tina)

Methamphetamine is a drug that belongs to a class of chemically related drugs that have similar effects. Amphetamines are stimulant drugs that increase the activity of the central nervous system and reproduce effects that are similar to the hormone adrenalin. Methamphetamine is slightly different to amphetamine chemically and is what now makes up the amphetamine market in Australia.

The three main forms of methamphetamine used are speed (a powder), base (a paste) and ice (crystals). They are all the same drug but due to the manufacturing process, have varying purity. Ice has been found to have purity levels of up to 80% while speed is more likely to have a purity of about 10%. As these are street drugs, it is impossible to know the purity and also what it has been 'cut' with.

How is it used?

Methamphetamine can be snorted, swallowed, smoked, injected and can also be inserted anally. The crystals can be smoked in a pipe and this method can be as harmful as injecting the drug, as they both have a rapid effect which increases the risk for becoming dependent.

Immediate effects:

- Euphoria and feelings of wellbeing
- Talkativeness, restlessness and excitement
- Increased energy, alertness and self confidence
- Increased heart rate, breathing and blood pressure
- Reduced appetite
- Sleeplessness
- Nausea and vomiting
- Teeth grinding

High dose and/or long term effects

- Sleeping problems, anxiety, tension
- Headaches, blurred vision, dizziness
- Tremors, irregular heart beat, stomach cramps
- Repetitive or unpredictable behaviour
- Aggression, hostility, irrational behaviour
- Strokes, heart failure, coma
- Paranoia and hallucinations (speed psychosis)
- Relationship, work and financial problems

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Speed psychosis

One of the main issues for users is 'speed psychosis', which is more likely to affect regular users but can also be bought on with a large dose of high purity ice. While some people become aggressive or violent because they are experiencing severe paranoia and hallucinations, many experience mild symptoms and may not realise they have had an episode. Mild symptoms can include mild visual and auditory disturbances (like hearing a phone ring when it didn't) or feeling overly self conscious because people are watching you. These symptoms usually stop when the drug wears off and are a sign that you need to reduce or stop use. Once you have experienced psychosis, you are vulnerable to repeated and more intense episodes.

Risk of hepatitis C

Snorting speed or ice can damage the nose (especially the septum) and can lead to nose bleeds and tearing of the nasal wall. Hepatitis C is a blood borne virus and there is a small risk of transmission if you are sharing notes, straws or other equipment (which may have traces of blood) used to snort drugs.

Mixing with other drugs

When you use stimulant drugs it is easier to drink more alcohol than you normally would. Stimulant drugs like methamphetamine have a cancelling out effect with alcohol and people may report that they don't feel drunk in this situation but the harmful effects on the body are still at work. Combining methamphetamine with alcohol causes massive dehydration and increases the chance of overheating. Mixing with other stimulant drgs such as ecstasy and cocaine dramatically increases the potential for drug related toxicity and overdose.

Methamphetamine and driving

Driving under the influence of any type of amphetamine is dangerous as judgment is impaired and you may take extra risks due to the overconfident 'pumped up' feeling you may experience. Reaction times are slowed down when you are coming off the drug which can be attributed to factors such as lack of sleep. It is illegal to drive while under the influence of illicit drugs and police now have dedicated Random Drug Testing units that can perform a quick roadside saliva test to detect methamphetamine, ecstasy and cannabis.

It is important to remember that the best way to avoid harm from drugs is not to use at all.

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Useful Links

National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre www.ndarc.med.unsw.edu.au

Australian Drug Foundation www.adf.org.au

Helping meth users help themselves www.meth.org.au

RTA Road drug test factsheet -

<http://ols2.rta.nsw.gov.au/ebus/docs/rescat/pdf/1/637/45094006roaddrgtest10-08.pdf>

ADF Ice (crystal methamphetamine) How Drugs Affect You [14]

NCETA (2004) Alcohol and Other Drugs: A Handbook for Health Professionals

NDARC On Thin Ice – A Users Guide NDARC Amphetamines Fact sheet