

What is methamphetamine?

Methamphetamine is a synthetic (man-made) stimulant that is highly addictive. The drug is abused because it produces euphoric effects—sometimes described as a sense of well-being—that can last up to 24 hours. Methamphetamine is inexpensive and relatively easy to produce—making it affordable and readily available to teenagers.

What does it look like?

Because methamphetamine can be produced using many different methods, its appearance can vary dramatically. The drug may be sold either as a powder—sometimes crystalline—or as rock-like chunks. The color of methamphetamine likewise varies: white, yellow, brown, gray, orange, and pink all have been observed.

How is methamphetamine abused?

Methamphetamine can be injected, smoked, snorted, or ingested orally. Injecting or smoking the drug produces an immediate and intense rush. The euphoric effect that results from snorting or ingesting the drug is not as intense and requires more time to take effect—3 to 5 minutes for snorting and 15 to 20 minutes for oral ingestion.

Who uses methamphetamine?

In the past the typical methamphetamine user was an adult male with a lower than average income. However, now individuals of all ages and economic status use methamphetamine. Data reported in the National Household Survey on Drug Abuse indicate that an estimated 9.6 million U.S. residents aged 12 and older used methamphetamine at least once in their lifetime. The survey also revealed that many teenagers and young adults use methamphetamine—338,000 individuals aged 12 to 17 and 1.5 million individuals aged 18 to 25 used the drug at least once.

Methamphetamine use among high school students is a particular concern. Nearly 7 percent of high school seniors in the United States used the drug at least once in their lifetime, and nearly 2 percent used the drug in the past month, according to the University of Michigan's Monitoring the Future Survey.

What are the risks?

Methamphetamine use is associated with many serious physical problems. The drug can cause rapid heart rate, increased blood pressure, and damage to the small blood vessels in the brain—which can lead to stroke. Chronic use of the drug can result in inflammation of the heart lining. Overdoses of methamphetamine can cause hyperthermia (elevated body temperature), convulsions, and death.

Individuals who abuse methamphetamine also may have episodes of violent behavior, paranoia, anxiety, confusion, and insomnia. Methamphetamine also can produce psychotic symptoms that persist for months or years after an individual has stopped using the drug.

Methamphetamine abusers who inject the drug expose themselves to additional risks, including contracting human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), hepatitis B and C, and other blood-borne viruses. Chronic users who inject methamphetamine also risk scarred or collapsed veins, infections of the heart lining and valves, abscesses, pneumonia, tuberculosis, and liver and kidney disease.

What is it called?

The most common names for methamphetamine are crack, meth, and speed. (Please see the Street Terms text box below for additional names.)

Street Terms for Methamphetamine

Beanies	Getgo
Brown	Methlies quik
Chalk	Mexican crack
Chicken feed	Redneck cocaine
Cinnamon	Rock
Crink	Tick tick
Crypto	Wash
Fast	Yellow powder