

METHAMPHETAMINE

Methamphetamine (also known as meth, speed, ice, chalk, crank, or crystal) is a highly addictive illegal stimulant currently running rampant in the United States. Over the last ten years, its abuse has grown at a phenomenal rate, leading to more environmental, legal, and health problems among users. In relation to the plethora of illegal drugs available, crystal meth is the fastest-growing illegal substance in North America, according to a [study](#) from the *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*.

The euphoria associated with meth is similar to that of other stimulants, like amphetamines or cocaine. When a user takes meth, dopamine—the naturally occurring brain chemical associated with happiness, pleasure, and rewards—increases. The short-term effects of the drug include an irregular and/or rapid heartbeat, increased blood pressure, increased body temperature, suppressed appetite, quick breathing, increased physical activity, and increased wakefulness.

Long-term effects are increasingly dangerous the longer a user has taken meth. One of the most visible effects is often referred to as “meth mouth,” when a meth user’s teeth have begun to rot and decay, appearing black and gray, broken and cracked. There is no cure for meth mouth, other than pulling out the teeth. Another way to readily spot a meth user is by the scabs on the user’s face. Meth users have intense itching on their face and will continuously scratch and pick at the scabs. Staying awake for days, or even weeks, is another red flag that a meth user is in the house.

Other symptoms of meth use include anxiety, confusion, tremors, irritation, aggressiveness, violent tendencies, extreme paranoia, delusions and hallucinations, malnutrition and extreme weight loss, cardiovascular damage, and severe mental health issues. “Tweaking” is the term often used to describe a meth user’s psychotic actions.

Mentally, prolonged methamphetamine use changes the way the brain produces dopamine. Long-term meth use also effects memory and emotion, and can cause memory problems and emotional problems in meth users—in some cases, even after the user has gotten clean. Abusing meth can cause some patients to develop psychotic symptoms, or psychosis (including hallucinations). According to a [study](#) in the *Journal of Neuroimmune Pharmacology*, “While amphetamines such as METH can precipitate and exacerbate psychotic symptoms in persons with schizophrenia, it has long been recognized that such drug use can produce psychotic symptoms even in persons with no history of a primary psychotic disorder.”

Methamphetamine psychosis is a mental disorder that is not schizophrenic, but can be very serious. Hallucinations experienced by those with methamphetamine psychosis include auditory hallucinations (hearing things that are not there, or hearing voices when no one else is in the room), visual hallucinations (seeing things that are not there), olfactory hallucinations (smelling things that are not there), tactile hallucinations (feeling things that are not there—in many cases, experiencing a sensation of insects or bugs crawling on or under the skin), and gustatory hallucinations (tasting things that are not there). Meth use can also cause delusions—firmly maintained beliefs that are contradicted by reality. Commonly experienced delusions include the belief that the person is being watched, persecuted, or controlled in some way. Delusions of grandeur (feeling powerful) are also common, as are somatic delusions (the false, fixed belief that the user’s bodily functioning or appearance is abnormal, diseased, or undergoing changes when it is not). Some of these mental health issues will go away after the patient has been clean for over a year; in other cases, the mental health changes are irreversible. These symptoms of methamphetamine psychosis can be very frightening, both for the user and for their loved ones who may not know how to help. Fortunately, help for these and other symptoms is available at Soul Surgery in Scottsdale, Arizona.

Mental illness goes hand in hand with meth use. In fact, meth is seldom seen alone; it is almost always connected to a mental health issue. According to a 2018 [study](#) by the National Institute on Drug Abuse, “Multiple national population surveys have found that about half of those who experience a mental illness during their lives will also experience a substance use disorder and vice versa.” Due to the heightened connection between meth use and mental issues, users seeking recovery are wise to seek out a licensed facility trained in co-occurring Disorders, often referred to as dual Diagnosis. Soul Surgery is a state-of-the-art behavioral health facility specializing in evidence-based treatment of co-occurring disorders such as meth and mental health issues.

Meth use also greatly increases the risk of contracting HIV/AIDS, especially for users who inject the drug, as HIV/AIDS is transmitted through blood and bodily fluids. Moreover, for patients who already have contracted HIV/AIDS, meth use worsens the virus’ progression by causing greater injury to nerve cells and by increasing cognitive problems. Those with HIV/AIDS and active substance use disorders are also more likely to stop taking their HIV medication regularly, due to the impaired judgment caused by substance abuse, which can worsen symptoms and, ultimately, lead to AIDS-related mortality.

Withdrawal from crystal meth is frightening. Symptoms include psychosis, depression, extreme fatigue, overwhelming anxiety, and severe cravings. Unfortunately, there are no medications for methamphetamine detoxification approved by the U.S. government at this time, and professional behavioral therapy is the most accepted treatment method available for meth withdrawals. However, treatments for methamphetamine addiction, co-occurring disorders, and the subsequent withdrawals, are available at the Soul Surgery Addiction and Mental Health Center. At Soul Surgery, a highly skilled team of fully licensed therapists and doctors are available to assist patients seeking out the latest and most advanced evidence-based treatment.