



# P - Methamphetamine

## P, meth, ice, tina

Methamphetamine (meth) is one of a number of amphetamine-type drugs. Meth is a stimulant drug which comes in pill, powder, crystal and liquid forms. It is usually smoked (using a method similar to smoking crack) though can also be swallowed, snorted/inhaled, shelved and injected.

Most meth used in New Zealand is made in illegal ‘labs’ and is known as P whereas overseas or imported methamphetamine is more commonly known as Ice due to its clear crystal appearance. P is sold by the ‘point’ (0.1 gram) or in ‘quarters’ and ‘dollar bags’ (usually less than a point). Methamphetamine is a Class A controlled substance under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1975. Manufacture, trafficking, sale and use carry severe penalties including prison.

## What methamphetamine does

Methamphetamine is a central nervous system stimulant meaning it increases the levels of certain chemicals in the brain and increases alertness, attention, energy, and physical activity. The effects vary depending on a person’s tolerance, how much they take and how it’s taken.

Methamphetamine causes:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>dry mouth and dehydration, enlarged pupils, hyperactivity, and talkativeness</li> <li>inability to sleep, anxiety/ irritability, panic attacks</li> <li>increased confidence, alertness and energy, and a sense of well-being or euphoria</li> <li>decreased appetite/ desire for food</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>itching, picking, scratching at skin</li> <li>irregular heartbeat, palpitations</li> <li>shortness of breath, irregular breathing</li> <li>increased sex drive</li> <li>less inhibited</li> </ul>
Large amounts can produce:	An overdose can result in:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>very high body temperature (hyperthermia)</li> <li>shaking and repetitive jerky movements</li> <li>irregular breathing and heart rates/ palpitations</li> <li>feelings of being powerful or superior</li> <li>increased risk of aggression or violence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>heart attack or stroke</li> <li>sweating and headaches</li> <li>burst blood vessels in the brain</li> <li>seizures (fits)</li> <li>death</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Methamphetamine psychosis: people who use a lot of methamphetamine may experience paranoid delusions, hallucinations (seeing and hearing things that aren’t real) and exhibit bizarre, aggressive or violent behaviour, all signs of ‘methamphetamine psychosis’</li> </ul>	
People who use over a long period of time may develop general ill-health as well as:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dependence/ addiction meaning they find it difficult to stop using and experience withdrawal symptoms when they do</li> <li>Malnutrition and lack resistance to infections with the body taking longer to heal. Some people experience tooth decay and dental problems</li> <li>Severe mental or emotional disturbances (e.g. paranoia and hallucinations). After one episode of psychosis even small amounts of methamphetamine can trigger another psychotic episode</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased risks of high blood pressure, heart attacks and strokes</li> <li>Possible long term or permanent damage to nerve cells in the brain</li> <li>Chronic sleeping problems</li> </ul>

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## Harms associated with methamphetamine

As well as the harms mentioned on the previous page, harm can also be caused by contaminants and by-products of the manufacturing process. This is particularly risky if the drug is being injected. (See *Looking for help?* below)

Combining any amphetamines with drugs for erectile dysfunction increases the risk of contracting blood borne viruses like HIV during sex and increases the chances of having a heart attack or stroke. The combination can result in a condition called priapism where an erection doesn't go down - extremely painful and dangerous for the man affected.

After using methamphetamine people can feel exhausted and irritable with moods swinging from elation to depression. They can be reactive and in some cases violent especially after heavy and prolonged use. These feelings can last several days after methamphetamine use has stopped. People who are dependent on methamphetamine can feel this way for months.

### Pregnancy and breast feeding

In pregnancy methamphetamine (like other drugs) crosses the placenta so the unborn baby is affected and may display withdrawal symptoms when born. Using methamphetamine when pregnant increases the risk of miscarriage, premature labour, separation of the placenta from the uterus (potentially life threatening for mother and baby), and various effects on babies prenatally exposed to methamphetamine including small size and lethargy.

Although breast milk is the perfect food for your baby it is not advisable to breastfeed if you are using methamphetamine regularly. If you use once and it isn't likely to happen again the information available encourages waiting 24-48 hours prior to returning to breastfeeding. You would need to pump after this and throw this milk away.

## Harm Reduction tips

- No use is safest - especially around babies and children. If you choose to use make arrangements for children to be cared for by someone who is not using
- Eat well before using and sip about 2 cups (500mls) water each hour. Don't drink too much though as this can cause brain swelling, convulsions, coma and even death. Clean your teeth and use chewing gum to minimise tooth grinding
- Avoid alcohol and caffeinated drinks which dehydrate you and catch up on fluids, food and sleep the next day
- Avoid mixing with other drugs or medications like antidepressants, HIV or AIDS meds. The results can be unpredictable plus it overworks the system – especially the liver
- Taking any type of amphetamine orally is generally safer than smoking, injecting, or snorting because the stomach can handle acidic and foreign substances better than your lungs, veins, or nose. Swallowing amphetamines in empty pill capsules or wrapped in cigarette papers and drinking plenty of water reduces potential harm
- The vapour produced from smoking P can damage the lungs, and smoking is more addictive than snorting or eating
- If snorting ensure it is finely chopped with a razor or knife and use alternate nostrils
- Avoid sharing straws for snorting. Blood and mucus left on the straw can cause the spread of blood borne viruses like hepatitis and HIV
- Injecting methamphetamine increases risks of HIV and hepatitis if needles (and other equipment) are shared, plus potential damage to veins, organs etc.
- Sex on methamphetamine can be rough and long, with sore bits, broken condoms and a greater chance of sexually transmitted infections. Always use condoms and lube
- Avoid driving: methamphetamine use can lead to impaired judgment and increase risk taking. Also, the effects of withdrawal include tiredness and it is never a good idea to drive when tired.

## Looking for help?

If you're looking for more information, or maybe want to talk to someone about methamphetamine or other drug issues for yourself or someone close to you give [Auckland CADS](#) a call on **09 845-1818**

For confidential advice, support or information contact Alcohol & Drug Helpline on 0800-787-797 10am to 10pm daily

For IV equipment information and advice on reducing harm when injecting see [www.needle.co.nz](http://www.needle.co.nz) or phone ADIO on 09 356 7373

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