



PORTRAIT OF METH USER

Addiction to methamphetamines affects a person's entire life—appearance, personality, mental health and personal choices. For instance:

Behavior: People who use methamphetamines may appear euphoric, jittery, nervous or full of energy. They may engage in repetitive motions. They may frequently act bizarre, violent, confused and anxious. Their appetite is reduced and they may experience insomnia.

Attitude: The euphoria and increased energy resulting from taking methamphetamines can lead to impulsive risk-taking behaviors such as criminal acts, violence and sexual promiscuity. Long-term users may experience little or no pleasure in life.

Physical Appearance: Frequent users may experience severe weight loss and/or anorexia. They may sweat frequently and have body odor. Their skin may be pale and may be covered with scars or open sores. These scars or sores can come from skin abscesses from injecting the drug. In addiction, meth users often suffer from “**formication**,” hallucinations that make users think that they have bugs crawling on or under their skin. They scratch their skin open to try and get rid of these “crank bugs.”

Cardiovascular System: Methamphetamines increase the heart rate and blood pressure and can cause irregular heartbeats, heart attacks, poor circulation and cardiovascular collapse. Injecting the drug can lead to damaged blood vessels. Chronic use leads to inflammation of the heart lining. Irreversible damage to blood vessels in the brain can cause strokes. Hyperthermia (elevated body temperature) from methamphetamine use can cause convulsions, muscle, kidney and liver damage, and death.

Central Nervous System: Methamphetamine use can cause neuron loss and damage, seizures, slowed motor skills and movement disorders.

Respiratory System: Methamphetamine use can constrict the blood vessels in the lungs, cause excess fluid on the lungs and eventually result in chronic lung disease.

Brain: Methamphetamines reduce dopamine levels in the brain, which can lead to slowed motor skills, memory loss and symptoms similar to Parkinson's disease. Methamphetamine use can also result in cognitive impairment.

Mental Health: Methamphetamine users may experience paranoia, mood disturbances, delusions, homicidal or suicidal thoughts, and visual and auditory hallucinations. Methamphetamine use can also result in acute methamphetamine psychosis, a mental disorder similar to paranoid psychosis or schizophrenia. Psychotic episodes may continue months or years after the last use of the drug.

Addiction: Methamphetamines are extremely addictive. Treatment for methamphetamine abuse may be more difficult than for other drugs, possibly because of the long-term effects of methamphetamine use on the brain and the severe withdrawal symptoms experienced by users. Unlike other illicit drugs, there are currently no pharmacological treatments to assist in the treatment of methamphetamine dependence.

Other Risks: Methamphetamine users are at risk for **lead poisoning** because illegally manufactured methamphetamine is often contaminated with lead. Sharing needles and sexual risk-taking caused by increased libido put methamphetamine users at an increased risk for **sexually transmitted disease**, including HIV and hepatitis.

Specific Warning Signs of Methamphetamine Use

- Talking fast
- Quick, nervous body movement
- Extreme periods of energy followed by excessive sleep
- Staying up all night
- Weight loss
- Moody, anxious, irritable
- Anger, aggression and violence
- Paranoia
- Depression