

# METHAMPHETAMINE

# SPEED AND ICE: THE FACTS

## WHAT IS METHAMPHETAMINE?

Methamphetamine is a stimulant, one of the amphetamine group of drugs manufactured from readily available chemicals. Stimulants speed up the function of the brain and nervous system.

Sometimes, doctors prescribe amphetamine drugs to treat some health problems. But mostly, people use amphetamine that is made illegally. Most of these drugs currently sold on the street in Australia are methamphetamine or variants of this molecule which are stronger than prescribed amphetamines.

## FORMS OF METHAMPHETAMINE

Methamphetamine is available in three different forms commonly known as speed, base and ice but they differ in their purity. Ice is about 80% pure, whereas speed is typically around 10-20% pure.

People have been known to have serious mental and physical difficulties after using a lot of ice.

## SPEED

Speed usually comes in the form of white or yellow powder, but can also be bought as pills. People either sniff it through the nose (snort it), inject it or swallow it in tablet or capsule form. Speed is also known as go-ee, whiz, rev and uppers. People who sell speed often mix or cut the powder with other things that look the same, to make the drug go further. Some mixed-in substances can have unpleasant or harmful effects. It is difficult to tell what the drug actually contains.

## BASE

Base is a damp or oily substance with a white to yellow or brown colour which is more pure than powder. It can vary a lot in its appearance and is also known as pure, paste and wax. Base is usually injected but sometimes swallowed. It isn't commonly used in Australia.

## ICE

Ice is the purest form of methamphetamine available in Australia. It usually looks like colourless to white crystals or a coarse crystal-like powder, but it can also appear in other colours. Ice is also called crystal, crystal meth, meth or shabu. Ice is usually smoked or injected. A drug that is smoked or injected enters the brain more quickly which creates a "rush" that many people find very difficult to resist repeating. This is why some people think it is "more addictive". Ice is also sniffed through the nose (snorted), swallowed or inserted into the anus (shafted). All forms of ingestion can have a physical and mental impact, including dependence.

Because of its purity, ice is more powerful than speed and base and when used puts a greater strain on the body. Its use can therefore be much more dangerous. It has stronger side effects and a worse comedown. During a 'comedown', the user may feel physically and emotionally drained. Some users may experience a 'crash' – negative feelings associated with coming down.

Variations in the methamphetamine structure also produce other drugs such as MDMA (methylenedioxy methamphetamine) or ecstasy.

## EFFECTS OF METHAMPHETAMINE

What effect methamphetamine has on you depends on:

- how much you take and how pure it is
- your height and weight
- your general health
- your mood
- your past experience with speed
- whether you use methamphetamine on its own or with other drugs.

The immediate and long-term effects of all types of methamphetamine are the same.

Because ice is a more potent or purer form of methamphetamine all the effects and side-effects are more likely to occur and be more intense than speed and base.

Physical Effects may include:

- heart beating faster (palpitations)
- breathing faster
- feeling less hungry
- blood pressure rising
- pupils in your eyes getting bigger
- sweating a lot
- moving more quickly

- finding it hard to sleep
- jaw clenching and teeth grinding
- getting headaches
- feeling dizzy
- feeling restless
- shaking
- having irregular breathing
- having a very fast or irregular heartbeat and chest pains
- becoming pale.

Psychological effects may include:

- feeling very good and confident
- feeling alert and energetic
- being excited or agitated

- talking a lot
- feeling sexually aroused
- feeling aggressive
- feeling anxious or panicky
- taking more risks than usual
- feeling very powerful or better than others
- becoming hostile or aggressive
- developing psychosis – where you hear voices, imagine things, fear that others want to hurt you
- making the symptoms of an existing mental health disorder worse.

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# EFFECTS OF METHAMPHETAMINE

## LONG TERM EFFECTS

If you use methamphetamine often and for a long time you may:

- become dependent on the drug (see 'Tolerance and Dependence')
- become irritable, anxious or agitated
- have decreased memory and concentration
- get sick more often because your body can't resist disease properly
- feel down
- develop psychosis
- have relationship, work, money, legal or housing problems
- impair your capacity as a parent/primary carer of children.

The way a person takes methamphetamine can also cause problems such as:

- Snorting the drug can lead to nosebleeds, sinus problems and damage inside the nose.
- Injecting methamphetamine with unsterile injecting equipment makes you more likely to contract blood borne viruses such as HIV, hepatitis B and C, and get blood poisoning (septicaemia) and skin abscesses (sores with pus). NEVER share fits (needles and syringes), spoons, water, filters, alcohol swabs or tourniquets. In NSW, free sterile injecting equipment is available from Needle and Syringe Program (NSP) outlets and from selected pharmacists. Call the Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS) for the nearest NSP outlet.

- Injecting the drug can result in blocked blood vessels (caused by the drug constricting your blood vessels or by the substances sometimes mixed with 'speed') leading to serious damage to the body's organs such as the liver, heart, kidneys, inflamed blood vessels and abscesses.
- Injecting and snorting amphetamine type substances also increases the risk of becoming dependent on the drug and of getting other health problems.
- Dependent methamphetamine users are at greater risk of contracting a sexually transmitted infection, a blood borne virus or an unplanned pregnancy due to the increased likelihood of having unprotected sex.

## MIXING WITH OTHER DRUGS

People who use methamphetamine sometimes take other drugs at the same time to cope with some of the things methamphetamine does to the body. Some people take drugs such as minor tranquillisers (benzodiazepines), alcohol, marijuana or heroin to help them sleep. This can make you dependent on several drugs at once. For example, some people need speed or ice each day to get them going and benzodiazepines each night to get to sleep. This type of dependence can lead to many serious physical and psychological problems. Mixing different drugs can also make you more likely to overdose.

## OVERDOSE

Overdose of methamphetamine can happen to anyone who takes the drug. Even small amounts may cause overdose with some people who have an especially strong reaction to it. You are at greater risk of overdose if you are alone.

When a person overdoses, it may cause:

- methamphetamine induced psychosis, usually for a short time
- faster, irregular or weak heartbeat
- very high blood pressure
- heart attack or stroke
- bleeding in the brain
- very high fever
- death (rarely).

## METHAMPHETAMINE RELATED EMERGENCY

If you can't wake someone up or you are concerned that they may have sustained a head injury from a drug related fall – call an ambulance immediately – dial Triple Zero (000).

If the person has been mixing methamphetamines with other drugs, tell the NSW Ambulance paramedic exactly what they have taken. Paramedics are there to help. Generally paramedics don't involve the police **unless** there is danger to themselves or other people/children, someone dies, or a crime (such as violence or theft) has been committed.

## TOLERANCE AND DEPENDENCE

With regular use, anyone can develop a tolerance to speed, base or ice. Tolerance means that you must take more of the drug to feel the same effects you used to have with lower amounts.

Dependence on a drug such as methamphetamine means that it takes up a lot of your thoughts, emotions and activities. You also have trouble cutting back on your drug use even though it is causing you problems. Dependence on speed, base or ice can lead to a variety of health, money, legal, work and relationship problems. Not all people who use methamphetamine are dependent.

## PREGNANCY AND BREASTFEEDING

There is evidence that methamphetamine use can affect fetal development. Methamphetamine use during pregnancy has been linked with bleeding, early labour and miscarriage. Use of methamphetamines will also increase the heart rate of both mother and baby. Inform antenatal staff of methamphetamine use and attend regular antenatal checkups.

If methamphetamines are used by the mother close to birth, the baby may be born with symptoms of methamphetamine use. Babies of mothers who regularly use amphetamines may also experience withdrawal symptoms in the first few weeks after birth.

It is generally risky to take any drug while breastfeeding without medical advice.

## WITHDRAWAL

People who are dependent on speed, base or ice may find it very hard to stop using or cut down because of withdrawal symptoms. These can include:

- tiredness
- stomach cramps
- aches
- nausea
- hot and cold flushes
- hunger
- anxious or agitated
- deep depression (feeling very down or sad)
- being nervy or restless
- feeling angry or upset
- problems sleeping
- wanting speed very badly (cravings).

If you are experiencing problems with withdrawal, contact your doctor or health centre.

# DRIVING UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF METHAMPHETAMINE



Methamphetamine can make you feel more confident when you drive. This can make you take dangerous risks and have accidents. It is illegal to drive under the influence of drugs, including speed, base and ice. If you break this law you could lose your licence for a set time, or be fined.

Police can test drivers for recent amphetamine use.

Anyone under the influence of speed, base or ice who kills or injures another person while driving a motor vehicle can be sentenced to a term in prison.

## THE LAW

Using speed, base or ice is illegal. If you use, sell or give these drugs to someone else and get caught, you could face substantial fines and penalties including a prison sentence.

## SELF-HELP ASSOCIATIONS

[na.org.au](http://na.org.au) for **Narcotics Anonymous Australia**, a non profit fellowship or society of recovering addicts who meet regularly to help each other stay clean via a program of complete abstinence from all drugs.

## INFORMATION AND ADVICE

For free and confidential advice about alcohol and other drugs 24 hours, 7 days a week, call the **National Alcohol and Other Drug hotline: 1800 250 015**. It will automatically direct you to the Alcohol and Drug Information Service in the state or territory you are calling from.

Call ADIS for the nearest **needle and syringe program (NSP)** outlet.

Call the **ADIS Stimulant Treatment Line** on (02) 9361 8088 or 1800 101 188 for advice, support, referral and counselling for people concerned about stimulants or for information on the **Stimulant Treatment Program**.

**Your room** provides drug and alcohol information and advice, campaigns and resources. Visit [www.yourroom.com.au](http://www.yourroom.com.au)

**Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council** provides links to Aboriginal community controlled health services across NSW. Visit [www.ahmrc.org.au](http://www.ahmrc.org.au) for information about AHMRC members including a regional map, information and links to members websites.

**Drug and Alcohol Multicultural Education Centre (DAMEC)** provides services for people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Contact DAMEC on (02) 8113 1301 or for counselling and support services for CALD communities call (02) 8706 0150.

**Drug Info** provides facts and resources on alcohol and other drugs and the prevention of related harm. Visit [www.druginfo.adf.org.au](http://www.druginfo.adf.org.au)

**State Library of New South Wales Drug Info** provides up to date information on alcohol and other drugs in public libraries throughout NSW. Visit [www.druginfo.sl.nsw.gov.au](http://www.druginfo.sl.nsw.gov.au)

**eheadspace** provides mental health and wellbeing support, information and services for young people (12-25 years) and their family and friends. Visit [www.eheadspace.org.au](http://www.eheadspace.org.au)

**Family Drug Support** provides 24-7 telephone support to families in crisis due to drug and alcohol issues. Call the Helpline on 1300 368 186 or visit [www.fds.org.au](http://www.fds.org.au)

**Kids Helpline** is a free, 24 hour counselling service for young people aged 5 to 25 years. Counselling is offered via the Kids Helpline website [www.kidshelp.com.au](http://www.kidshelp.com.au) or email, or call 1800 55 1800.

**Nepean Youth Drug and Alcohol Service (NYDAS)** works within a holistic model of care to address a range of issues for young people (12 - 20 years of age) related to their alcohol and other drug use. Call (02) 4734 2129 or (02) 4734 1333.

**NSW Poisons Information Centre** provides the latest poisons information to the public, and toxicology advice to health professionals on the management of poisoned and envenomed patients. Telephone advice is available 24/7 on **131126** from anywhere in Australia.

**NSW Users and AIDS Association (NUAA)** is a peak drug user organisation in NSW providing harm reduction information and blood borne virus prevention peer education. Visit [www.nuaa.org.au](http://www.nuaa.org.au)

**ReachOut** is an Australian online youth mental health service with a mobile-friendly site and forums where you can access help, information and support. Visit [au.reachout.com](http://au.reachout.com)

**Sexual Health Info Link** provides free and confidential sexual health support and information. Visit [www.shil.nsw.gov.au](http://www.shil.nsw.gov.au)

**Smart Recovery** is a voluntary self-help group that assists people in recovering from alcohol, drug use and other addictive behaviours. Visit [www.smartrecoveryaustralia.com.au](http://www.smartrecoveryaustralia.com.au)

**TAFE NSW** provides help with education, career development or personal matters. Students can contact a local TAFE/university counsellor. Visit [www.tafensw.edu.au](http://www.tafensw.edu.au)

**Youth Action** is the peak organisation for young people in NSW. Visit [www.youthaction.org.au](http://www.youthaction.org.au) and use the search option to access a directory of NSW youth services.

**Youth Solutions** provides services for young people 12 to 25 years of age and the community including prevention and health promotion, drug and alcohol education, community programs and information and referral. Visit [www.youthsolutions.com.au](http://www.youthsolutions.com.au) or call (02) 4628 2319 [provides services to young people in Macarthur & Wingecarribee].

**NSW Health aims to reduce drug-related harm for individuals and the community by providing the facts, including the possible health, social and economic consequences of using alcohol and other drugs.**

A suite of drug and alcohol fact sheets is available for download at: [www.yourroom.com.au](http://www.yourroom.com.au)

