MADNESS of METH

Effects on the body; costs to users, society
- Highly addictive, causing brain damage
- Easy but highly dangerous to make; explosions are possible
- Toxic waste from making meth damages environment
- Strains law enforcement; requires hazardous cleanup

1. How drug is taken

Methamphetamine is a highly addictive stimulant that can be taken in many forms: snorting, smoking, injecting and swallowing. It enters the bloodstream and is circulated to the brain.

Snorting
Powdered meth is inhaled, causing a rush referred to as a "high".

Ingesting
Tablets of meth can be swallowed or mixed with drinks or food. Ingestion produces the same effects as snorting.

Smoking
Smoking meth immediately causes an intense sensation — a "flash" or "rush" described as extremely pleasurable.

Injecting
Injected meth takes effect instantly and has the same intensity as smoking.

2. What happens next

Methamphetamine works in a region packed with nerve cells that manufacture dopamine. Dopamine is a biochemical messenger (or neurotransmitter) that controls motivation, triggering pleasurable sensations.

Altering the brain function
Meth produces a storm of neurochemical activity by rapidly depleting levels of dopamine. Meth also blocks the nerve cells from reabsorbing used dopamine, producing a storm of neurochemical activity by rapidly depleting levels of dopamine. Meth also blocks the nerve cells from reabsorbing used dopamine, which leads to irreversible brain damage.

3. Damage to body

Short-term health
Meth can give intense euphoria, take away appetite, cause dramatic weight loss. Users tend to be gaunt and malnourished, prone to myriad health complications, including heart attacks, strokes, and kidney failure.

Psychological problems
Some users have skin rashes from scratching at imaginary bugs. Meth also increases anxiety, hyperactivity, and excitement, which may lead to irritability, insomnia, confusion, tremors, anxiety, hallucinations, paranoia, and aggressiveness. Severe mood swings cause some users to become manic-depressive and develop suicidal tendencies.

Brain damage
Studies dating back 20 years show that a high dose of meth damages nerve cells in the brain that produce dopamine and other neurotransmitters. Over time, meth appears to deplete the levels of dopamine. The nerves end up dying, and the brain begins to shrink.

4. Forms of meth

Methamphetamine comes in powder, pill, capsule, and solid forms.
- Powdered meth
- Snorting, injecting
- Meth "rock"
- Large crystals used mainly for smoking
- Meth crystal ball
- Melted and injected
- Image courtesy of DEA

5. Why users use

A longer high
- A single dose of meth lasts 6 to 8 hours.
- A single dose of cocaine lasts 1 to 20 minutes.

Extreme sensations
Meth makes you high, but it also drops you way down. The way the drug affects a person can be compared to the swaying of a pendulum. The "feel-good" emotions swing far beyond their usual boundaries. But the person feels far worse than usual as the pendulum of emotions swings back in the other direction.

Why use is increasing
Easy and cheap to make
Meth is relatively easy to make with ingredients available from stores. The highly addictive nature of the drug keeps the demand strong.

Lack of resources and few, if any, restrictions on key ingredients, such as ephedrine or pseudoephedrine, allow underground meth labs to flourish.

6. Brain damage from meth use

Normal: Three-dimensional model of a brain

Frequent use: Scan of the brain of a 36-year-old user who had been abusing meth for 10 years. The holes show lack of brain activity, indicating possible damaged cells.

Heavy use: Scan of the brain of a 28-year-old user who had been using meth heavily for up to 8 years. There are more holes than the frequent user's brain.

Sources: Drug Enforcement Administration, staff and news reports.

7. Costs to you

Increase in crimes and violence
Law enforcement has linked meth use to child and spousal abuse, property crimes, fraud, and homicides.

Dangerous meth making
Meth manufacturing endangers society and the environment. It releases harmful toxic chemicals to the environment. Chemicals used to produce the illegal drug are extremely volatile and toxic. Toxic byproducts can poison streams and kill vegetation and livestock.

Costly cleanup
Image courtesy of DEA

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9. Spotted a user

Frequent meth users typically are:
- Scared, anxious, and violent
- Disorganized
- Paranoiac
- Esteemed
- Extremely anxious
- Extremely agitated
- Often go without sleep for extended periods

Not hygienic, have rotting teeth and other signs of poor hygiene

10. Images

- Images of DEA
- Images of the brain
- Images showing effects of meth