Dramatic increases in methamphetamine use make it important for health care providers to be aware of the signs and symptoms of methamphetamine use in order to most effectively educate and care for their patients.

Methamphetamine is commonly referred to as “meth.” Meth has other slang terms such as crystal meth, speed, ice, crank, hew/hexe, glass, fine, uppers, and yaba. Meth users are often at an increased risk for HIV and hepatitis B and C, through shared drug using equipment. Some of the side effects of meth, such as decreased inhibition and increased libido, can lead to unprotected sex with multiple partners, also increasing the risk for these and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Recognizing meth use and providing appropriate education, treatment, and referral resources is a critical role for health care providers.

**Meth in the Mouth**

Cervical caries and heavy plaque associated with xerostomia. It is important to assess the reason(s) behind xerostomia. Xerostomia can be caused by a number of factors including medications, autoimmune diseases, HIV disease, and methamphetamine and cocaine use.

Infected burn from glass methamphetamine pipe.

Wide-spread dental caries associated with methamphetamine use.

Missing posterior teeth, generalized heavy plaque, inflamed peridontium, and caries at the gingival margin are examples of oral disease associated with methamphetamine use.
When a person inhales or smokes meth, the caustic ingredients – meth reduces blood flow to the teeth and periodontal structures, the side effects of any prolonged use are still a factor for the user’s oral health. www.ada.org/prof/resources/topics/methmouth.asp

Key ingredients in the manufacturing process include, but are not limited to, sodium, hydroxyl, hydrochloric acid, ether, xanthine, pseudoephedrine, and amphetamineamines.

Methamphetamine use

Inhaling or snorting meth causes a person to inhale or snort meth, the caustic ingredients can cause irritation or trauma to mucosal tissues in the mouth and cause burns, which can lead to infection.

Snoozing: When snorting meth, the user drives agents into the nasal cavities and down the back of the throat, exposing the oral cavity and throat to the same caustic ingredients. Although the oral effects are not as prominent with smoking/inhaling, snorting can cause significant oral effects.

Other methods: While not a typical use of methamphetamine, these drug use strategies are used as a factor for the user’s health.

Drug Side Effects

Methamphetamine use can cause appetite suppression, dry mouth, and insomnia. In addition, drug-induced changes in the cardiovascular system, including hypertension, tachycardia, and irregular and rapid heart rates. Violent and excitable behaviors may also occur. In some cases, methamphetamine use can lead to delusions of insects creeping on the skin, Parkinsonian-like tremors, anxiety, paranoia, and hallucinations. Methamphetamine use tends to decrease appetite and users tend to lose weight. Users may also neglect personal and oral hygiene, especially over binge periods (called “on a run”), sometimes lasting days. Such binges may be followed by extended periods of sleep allowing debris to sit on the teeth without timely removal.

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