

YOUR SKIN AND WEIGHT

The Ugly Truth

Meth often causes delusions where the user believes bugs are crawling under their skin. Because of this, many users develop a compulsive need to pick at their skin, which usually leads to open and infected sores. Meth also increases your chances of severe acne, and it also makes your skin look leathery and just unhealthy.

Because meth is a stimulant, it also acts as an appetite suppressant. Before the effects were truly understood, many people would use meth as a diet pill. Talk about unsafe! Users reported a severe loss of appetite and would just forget to eat regularly, some even going days without food. Not only does meth make you look older and more ragged, it doesn't take long for you to look completely emaciated.

METH & YOUR LUNGS

Left Breathless

Meth can have some major side effects to your lungs, especially depending how it's taken. Rapid breathing can make you feel lightheaded and cause you to pass out. If you smoke it, you can begin to cough up blood because the part of your lungs responsible for gas exchange with the blood supply—the alveoli—can be damaged by meth. Snorting meth can also lead to a collapse lung, which can make breathing impossible. Meth can also be dirty or contaminated with other chemicals, and when you breathe it in, that scum can lead to lung disease.



TEST YOURSELF

How does meth affect your body? Let's test your knowledge.

- Meth was originally used as a diet aid because it's an appetite suppressant.
 - True
 - False
- Which of the following is NOT a brain-related side effect of meth use?
 - Depression
 - Strokes
 - Hallucinations
 - Cracked Teeth
- Which of the following causes "meth mouth?"
 - Lack of Saliva
 - Compulsive need to grind teeth
 - Just being too high to remember to perform basic hygiene
 - All of the Above
- There's a correlation between meth users and an increase in risk for Parkinson's disease because of the way meth produces abnormalities in the substantia nigra area.
 - True
 - False
- Meth often causes delusions where the user believes bugs are crawling under their skin. Because of this, many users develop a compulsive need to pick at their skin, which usually leads to open and infected sores.
 - True
 - False

ANSWERS: 1. a, 2. d, 3. d, 4. a, 5. a



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CAUSE AND EFFECT

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METH AND YOUR BODY



WHAT IS METH?

Meth, or methamphetamine, is an illegal drug in the same class as cocaine and other dangerous street drugs. It's a psychostimulant, meaning it stimulates receptors in the brain to produce feelings of pleasure and euphoria, a rush of confidence, and hyperactivity. It also acts as an appetite suppressant. Six to eight hours is the usual effect time of the drug, but many people experience effects up to twenty-four hours. Originally developed and approved for adults with ADHD or obesity under the name Desoxyn, meth is more commonly known as a recreational drug that is snorted, smoked, or injected with a needle. Nicknames include crank, chalk, and speed.

EFFECTS ON YOUR BRAIN

Way Overstimulated

Meth works to produce that high feeling by interacting with the serotonin and dopamine receptors in the brain; they're what make you feel happy when you do things like hanging out with friends, exercising, or doing something else you enjoy. When meth is involved, there's an extreme release of those chemicals, which can then destroy your brain's naturally occurring supply. Eventually, that overstimulation can lead to the destruction of the receptors, so you have more difficulty experiencing pleasure—which can lead to feelings of depression.

Meth also affects the way blood flows into the brain, which can result in a stroke. Strokes can cause memory loss, partial or total paralysis, speech loss, and even death. There's also a correlation between meth users and an increase in risk for Parkinson's disease because of the way meth produces abnormalities in the substantia nigra area. Psychosis is another condition where meth use increases the risk. Hallucinations and paranoia can be caused by meth, and even though some people report no more symptoms between 1 to 6 months after quitting, other users find that psychotic symptoms can occur after longer periods of abstinence.

EFFECTS ON YOUR MOUTH AND DIGESTIVE SYSTEM

No More Pearly Whites

"Meth mouth" is an infamous side effect and is definitely a major indicator of meth abuse. When you use meth, your mouth becomes dry, and the lack of saliva reduces your body's ability to defend itself against bacteria that cause cavities. You're also more likely to have a compulsive need to grind your teeth, which can wear them down over time. That combined with just being too high to remember basic hygiene, tooth decay, gum erosion or recession, cracked teeth, or even losing teeth are all common experiences of meth users.

Meth also has a risk on your digestive system. Because meth makes your blood vessels smaller, oxygen can't get to your bowels, which could cause the tissue to die and you become infected and septic—basically your insides are so infected with bacteria your organs begin to shut down.

YOUR HEART AND CIRCULATORY SYSTEM

You Make My Heart Skip a Beat...But Not in a Good Way

Meth causes your blood vessels to become constricted, which can not only cause problems for other organs like your brain or bowels, but also your heart. Because your blood vessels become tighter, your heart has to work a lot harder. This added stress causes things like heart palpitations—where you feel a pounding feeling in your chest or neck—or arrhythmia, which means your heart is all out of whack and irregular. An irregular heartbeat can cause lightheadedness, passing out, or even a heart attack.



CARISSA'S STORY

Former Beauty Queen

Living in a small, rural town, people took their beauty pageants very seriously. Carissa was no exception. She had won numerous titles throughout her childhood and teenage years, and she was a finalist in the state pageant. That meant major scholarship money for a college her parents would've never been able to afford on their own. It was Carissa's dream to be the first member of her family to go to college and make something of herself—not just for her looks but for her brains. She wanted to be lawyer or a doctor...that is until she tried meth for the first time.

While on the road with some friends for a pageant, Carissa met an older girl named Natalie. Natalie was on the thin side and had almost an ashy look to her skin, but she was otherwise nice to Carissa. "This is what I use to stay so thin for the bikini portion of the pageants," she said as she pulled out a little bag with white powder in it. Carissa was looking for something to give her an edge in the competition, and she had always struggled with her weight. She and Natalie went to a restroom, and she snorted some of that white powder off of her hand. Her life was never the same.

Within just a few months, she had lost everything. She developed rashes on her skin from the bugs she was imagining were under her skin, and her skin had that same ashy and leathery look as Natalie's. When a pageant director found her injecting herself with a syringe in a hotel bathroom, she was stripped of all of her titles, and her dreams for her future were ruined.