s often as not, people get into drugs like ice and crystal innocently enough. They take it to party or just to taste-test whatever the media is hyping as the next “Big Thing,” drug-wise.

For some, it starts and stops there. But for others, ice and its chemical cousins become a life-and-death ritual. And living without speed can seem a real dead-end existence to someone who’s learned to equate feeling wired with feeling alive. Don’t become one of them.

Because of all the drugs the media has picked up on since crystal meth made its first big splash in the deep end of the drug pool, probably none has produced more consistently-negative long-term effects to more people than speed.

And no matter what you call it, and no matter how it gets into your body, speed still kills. And, too often, it ruins what it doesn’t kill.

And that’s not hype. That’s just the way it is. And it’s probably the way it always will be.
For one thing, it’s easier to do. In powder form, meth requires a high temperature to vaporize, so smoking never really caught on before. Converting the drug to pure crystals made it easier to melt and produce a concentrated vapor.

Not only that, but ice also tends to be less diluted than methamphetamine, due to the difficulty of “cutting” crystals with additives and bulking agents.

Still, the potency of ice only adds to a list of problems linked to methamphetamine.

And there were plenty of those, to begin with.

### Actions • Hazards

No matter how they get to work, all forms of methamphetamine end up working in the same way in the same place, turning up the biochemistry of the brain.

Specifically, the drug increases the activity of two key neurotransmitters, dopamine and epinephrine. In low, prescribed doses (10-20 mg. taken orally), the drug unleashes a surge of energy and alertness and temporal loss of appetite. The result: alertness, tension, and all the signs of physical and psychological arousal—from racing thoughts and rapid breathing to activation of the body’s “fight or flight” response, making us ready to do or die.

But speed saves its most spectacular—and spectacularly dangerous—effects for those who smoke or inject the drug. In fact, effects of ice are identical to those produced by injection, since smoking and spraying involve direct pathways to the brain.

Each delivers a concentrated blast of the drug in seconds, compared with the longer, slower absorption that occurs with oral use. The effect is overwhelming: a flash of euphoria, followed by an extended period of energized alertness.

The rush is so powerful that users quickly crave it over the drug’s longer-lasting stimulant action. And that’s when problems really get started.

### Toxicity • Trouble

Methamphetamine troubles are legendary. They start with the physical effects of over-ampling—tremors, dizziness, nausea, and rapid heartbeat—and build all the way to overdose.

At higher doses, activity in the brain and central nervous system spins higher.

The result: alertness, tension, and all the signs of physical and psychological arousal—from racing thoughts and rapid breathing to activation of the body’s “fight or flight” response, making us ready to do or die.

But speed saves its most spectacular—and spectacularly dangerous—effects for those who smoke or inject the drug.

In fact, effects of ice are identical to those produced by injection, since smoking and spraying involve direct pathways to the brain.

Each delivers a concentrated blast of the drug in seconds, compared with the longer, slower absorption that occurs with oral use. The effect is overwhelming: a flash of euphoria, followed by an extended period of energized alertness.

The rush is so powerful that users quickly crave it over the drug’s longer-lasting stimulant action. And that’s when problems really get started.

### Managing a Meltdown: Getting Off Ice

Getting off ice—or any other stimulant drug—can be tricky. And staying off is trickier, still. But it can be done, and it is being done every day by lots of people. If you have a problem, you should be one of them.

Recovery starts when you admit that you’re hooked. It expands as you acknowledge the needs inside you that drive the craving and stare down the emptiness and boredom that can come with finding yourself suddenly speed-free.

But how do you beat it? You do it in lots of ways, one at a time or all at once.

Since a big part of speed’s allure derives from the physical arousal it generates, it’s important to find alternative activities to trigger similar feelings—without the boom-or-bust convulsive body-mind cycles of speed. Ways that work:

- **Running.** Running is a perfect way to relieve problems. It can induce trance-like states that dissolve negative feelings, and it helps the body burn off calories and control weight—reasons some get involved with speed in the first place. Walking works just as well, but takes longer.

- **Meditation.** Believe it or not, meditation and other alternative-focus activities can produce effects that end up feeling pretty stimulating. Don’t know how? Check out The Relaxation Response (by Dr. Herbert Benson) or Creative Visual-  

ization (by Shakti Gawain) from your local library for tips on getting started.

But get started—and do it now. Playing with ice is like playing with fire—except, with ice, it can take a while to know how badly you’ve been burned.