

Crystal meth

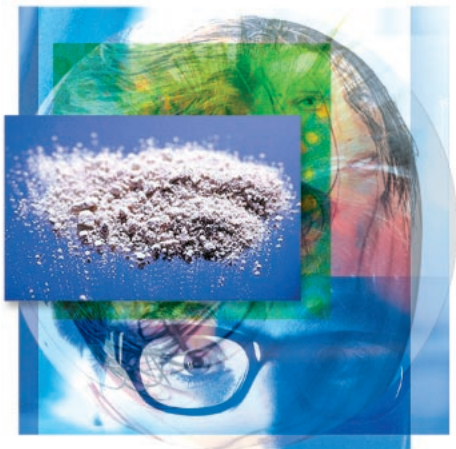
■ **Overview:** *Crystal* and *crystal meth* are common street names for methamphetamine, the most hyper-charged member of the amphetamine drug family. Widely used in the 1960's and early '70s for its intense effects, crystal virtually disappeared in the 1980's, but has resurfaced on a massive scale nationwide in recent years.



■ **Appearance:** White crystalline powder. Although legal amphetamine is odorless, illegal forms of the drug often have a strong ammonia smell, due to incomplete clearing of solvents or reagents during manufacture.

■ **Street Names:** Crank, meth, go-fast. Smokeable forms of crystal are called "ice" or "glass."

■ **Actions/Effects:** Crystal increases arousal in the central nervous system by pumping up levels of two neurotransmitters, *norepinephrine* and *dopamine*. At low doses, it boosts alertness and blocks hunger and fatigue. At higher doses, it causes exhilaration and euphoria. At very high doses, the drug can cause agitation, paranoia, and bizarre behavior. Physical effects include increased heart rate, blood pressure, and body temperature.



■ **Medical Uses:** Because of its short-term appetite-suppressant effects, Desoxyn[®], a prescription form of methamphetamine, is prescribed as a temporary treatment for obesity.

■ **Risks/Side Effects:** Anxiety, emotional swings, and paranoia are the most common psychological effects of chronic use. Symptoms increase with long-term use, and can involve paranoid delusions and hallucinations. Violence and self-destructive behavior are common. Overdose is also a risk with crystal. Symptoms include fever, convulsions, and coma. Death can result from burst blood vessels in the brain (triggered by spikes in blood pressure) or heart failure.



Toxic City. Chemicals used to “cook” crystal are toxic, and meth labs can be deadly.

■ **Duration:** Depends on dose and how the drug is administered.

■ **Trends:** Crystal use soared during the late-1990’s and early 2000’s but has fallen off in recent years. A main reason has been the nationwide movement to restrict distribution of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, necessary ingredients in bootleg methamphetamine production.

■ **Demographics:** Whenever crystal rears its ugly head, it causes problems for people, especially those unaware of its potential for physical and psychological harm. That’s the reason that, despite falling use levels, meth still managed to land 97,842 users in hospital emergency rooms during 2008.



This is one in a series of fact sheets on drugs and health published by Do It Now Foundation. Please call for a complete list of titles—or visit our web site at www.doitnow.org.



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