

Meth Mouth

Overview

Methamphetamine Use and Oral Health (Meth Mouth)



Methamphetamine is a cheap, easy-to-make illicit drug. It's known by several street names: Meth, Speed, Ice, Chalk, Crank, Fire, Glass, and Crystal. It is highly addictive and its use is on the rise in the U.S. even though it produces devastating effects on users' health.

Methamphetamine is a potent central nervous system stimulant that can cause shortness of breath, hyperthermia, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, irregular heart beat, high blood pressure, permanent brain damage and rampant tooth decay. Some users describe their teeth as "blackened, stained, rotting, crumbling or falling apart." Often, the teeth cannot be salvaged and must be extracted.

The extensive tooth decay is probably caused by a combination of drug-induced psychological and physiological changes resulting in dry mouth and long periods of poor oral hygiene,



some reports have speculated that the acidity of the drug also damages teeth. A methamphetamine "high" lasts much longer than that produced by crack cocaine (12 hours versus one hour for cocaine). This can lead to long periods of poor oral hygiene. And while they are high, users often crave high-calorie, carbonated, sugary beverages or they may grind or clench their teeth, all of which can harm teeth.

Heavy users may appear malnourished because methamphetamine acts as an appetite suppressant.

According to the 2008 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, methamphetamine use is declining (from an estimated 731,000 past month users in 2006 to 314,000 past month users in 2008). However it is still a concern, particularly in rural areas and in the western, southwestern, and midwestern U.S.