

METH HARM
REDUCTION

INTRODUCTION

This resource was developed in consultation with people who currently use methamphetamine and participating in the **Rock Solid Methamphetamine Peer Education Program**. The aim of the program is for Peer Educators to share harm reduction strategies with peers, in an informal way.

Harm reduction is being aware of the harms and effects of methamphetamine; knowing that sometimes things can go wrong, and what you can do to prevent or minimise those harms.

This booklet includes information on how to keep yourself physically and mentally healthy when using methamphetamine ('gear', 'meth')

For more information on the Rock Solid program go to www.waaid.com/item/875-using-meth-safely.html

METH

Methamphetamine is a stimulant drug, so it speeds up the messages travelling between the brain and the body. Using gear can feel really good, and there are loads of reasons why people might use including:

- To help you stay awake
- To give you energy
- To increase your confidence
- To connect with people and socialise
- To lower inhibitions and try things you wouldn't usually do
- Blow off steam / alleviate stress
- To increase sex drive
- To have the sex you want



When using gear, your body can be pushed to the limit. It can be easy to forget to eat and drink but going without for extended periods of time is not good for you.

- Preload on healthy foods before you get on the gear. Meals with protein and carbohydrate are great.
- Have some food at the ready for later on, when you start to crash and recover
- Eat even if you don't feel hungry, as your body will need the fuel
- If you inject your gear, being well hydrated can help make it easier to find a vein.
- Keep yourself hydrated by drinking plenty of water. Aim to drink between 250mls – 600mls per hour. Meth makes your body temperature rise and makes you sweat more, which means you need more fluids to stay hydrated.
- Avoid alcohol, caffeine and soft drinks, as they will make you even more dehydrated.



SLEEP

If you are using gear over a few days, sleep will probably be the last thing on your mind. Not getting enough sleep can have serious and sometimes long term effects on your health. The longer you go without sleep, the higher your chances are of experiencing mental health issues such as paranoia, hearing voices or seeing things that other people can't see. If you're planning on using meth or having a big one these tips might be helpful:

- Try and get as much sleep and rest as you can beforehand
- If you can't sleep, lay down in a dark and quiet room or non-stimulating environment, close your eyes, and try to relax and rest
- If you are getting on gear frequently, try not to use for more than 2 days in a row, and always try to have at least 2 days break between use



MEDICATIONS

All drugs interact together differently, mixing other drugs with your meth could potentially cause harm. When using methamphetamine with other drugs, some of the risks can include:

- **Heroin and other opioids** – are depressants and can cause overdose
- **Alcohol** – is a depressant, meth can mask the effects of alcohol
- **Antidepressants** – can cause serotonin syndrome (toxicity)
- **Viagra** – decrease blood pressure, which can increase the risk of cardiac issues
- **GHB** – is a depressant and can cause overdose



SEXUAL HEALTH

IF YOU ARE MIXING THESE DRUGS TOGETHER CONSIDER THESE TIPS:

- Never use alone
- Tell someone which drugs you are using and ask them to keep an eye on you
- Using opioids (heroin or pills) to get some rest or sleep can be dangerous when you are really messed up. You can be more vulnerable to overdose and might be less careful when using; plan how much you're going to use before you crash
- Talk to a drug user friendly doctor about your medications and have an honest chat about your meth use and how it might affect your medications
- Remember some drugs, when used together, can amplify the drug's effects. Using smaller doses of each can help reduce harm

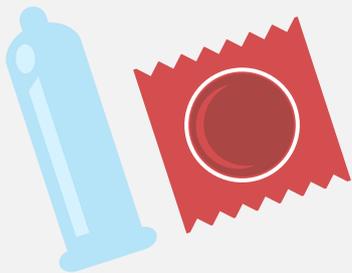
Having sex on gear can be really good. There are some things to keep in mind to help look after your physical and sexual health:

Short term effects:

- Decreased inhibitions (to ask for the type of sex you want to have or to do things you normally wouldn't do)
- Increased energy and libido for longer sex sessions
- Can decrease likelihood of cumming (riding the wave)
- Can cause erectile dysfunction ('crystal dick', 'rock cock')
- Sex injuries (penis/vagina/arse/front hole tears, abrasions and breaks)

Long term effects:

- Delayed / inability to cum
- Erectile dysfunction
- Strong connections between sex and gear – every time you want to have sex you get on gear and every time you get on gear you want to have sex



WAYS TO PROTECT YOUR SEXUAL HEALTH

If you are having sex on gear, you need to consider how you will reduce the risk of STIs, HIV and unwanted pregnancy. Good sexual health also includes negotiating the sex you want and consent.

Contraception: If you or your partner do not wish to become pregnant, it's important to plan your contraception. Speak to your GP or go to a sexual health clinic to find out what is most suitable for you.

Condoms: Condoms are an effective method for reducing the risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV.

PEP: Post Exposure Prophylaxis is an emergency medication that you can take if you think you have been exposed to HIV. For more information, call the PEP line on 1300 767 161.

Sexual Health Tests: Getting regular sexual health tests for all STIs and HIV is an important way of protecting both yourself and your partners.

Sex toys: use a condom for sex toys and keep clean

Lube: can prevent injuries like tears and abrasion during long sex sessions

Consent: you might have been up for it at the beginning however, if you change your mind, remember that you can withdraw consent at any time.

Planning your meth use during sex sessions: plan how much meth you plan to take during a sex session. Things can get exciting in the heat of the moment, which means you might use more gear than you planned, or someone else might get your gear ready for you. Know your limits

EQUIPMENT

Whether you choose to smoke or inject gear, you need to make sure you have new sterile equipment to use ahead of time. Rather than waiting until you're shaking with excitement and your stomach is doing backflips because you've got a bag of meth in front of you, make sure you have plenty of equipment on hand.

It's a good idea to have a spare pipe just in case you drop or lose your current one, try to have enough injecting equipment in case friends or others come around and you end up using more.

Having plenty of equipment reduces the risk of sharing and reduces the risk of HIV and or Hepatitis C transmission.



MENTAL HEALTH

Methamphetamine may affect your mental health. Some people experience depression, anxiety, or psychotic symptoms when using or coming down. In the majority of cases, these symptoms will resolve when the meth use stops.

Other people may have a pre-existing or underlying mental health issue. It is important to be aware of and consider any pre-existing issues as meth use may increase the severity of the mental health issues you experience.

If you experience any mental health issues with your drug use, it is important to speak to your GP so that you do not risk on-going issues or difficulties.

PSYCHOTIC EPISODES

A person experiencing a drug induced psychotic episode may have delusions, paranoia, hallucinations, or obsessive-compulsive behaviours, bizarre thoughts, feelings and behaviours, becoming withdrawn and easily startled or fearful. This can be really scary for you and the people around you.

Some behaviours to look out for include:

- Thinking you are being followed
- Feeling you have super human powers
- Thinking your phone is being monitored
- Thinking people are talking about you
- Obsessive picking at sores or wounds, injections sites, feeling like bugs are under your skin

How to help if you think someone may be experiencing a psychotic episode:

- Use their name, communicate calmly and reassure them
- Take them out of a stimulating environment, to a calm, quiet place with fewer people around (no lights, TV, music, traffic)
- Distract them by talking about something else
- Cool them down and get them to sip some water
- Don't tell them that their experience isn't real – it's important to remember that what they are experiencing is very real to them and telling them it isn't so may upset them further
- Don't get angry with them or confront them
- Don't dismiss or laugh off their delusion
- Don't leave them on their own
- Don't put yourself in danger

If the person is a harm to themselves, yourself or others, call the Police on 000. Give the police as much information as possible about the situation to support a mental health response.

To help protect your mental health you should:

- Keep track of how much you are using and how often you use
- If you find you are becoming paranoid or anxious, consider decreasing how much you use and how often you use for a while
- Take regular breaks and avoid using for a few days
- Get some sleep, drink fluids and have something to eat
- Remember, a good rest and use cycle is 2 x 2 x 2



OVERDOSE/TOXICITY

Experiencing a drug overdose is not a nice experience for anyone, if you over do it on the gear you could experience methamphetamine toxicity (overdose).

If someone is experiencing the following, it is a medical emergency and 000 needs to be called:

- Getting very hot, but not sweating
- Feeling like you're having a stroke – headache, loss of balance, blurred or decreased vision in one eye, difficulty speaking, experiencing numbness or partial paralysis
- Chest pain
- Breathing difficulty
- Seizure / fits
- Becoming unconscious

If someone is showing the following signs, keep an eye on them and manage the symptoms as they may get worse and need medical help:

- Feeling anxious
- Constant headache
- A racing heart / pulse
- Increased sweating
- Excessive thirst
- Short of breath
- Nausea and vomiting
- Chest pain

It can be hard to admit you may have overdone it on meth to the doctor or ambulance officer, but it's important you are honest so you can receive prompt and appropriate medical treatment. It could be the difference between life, death and a permanent disability.



COMING DOWN

A whole range of things can happen when you're coming down. Symptoms vary from person to person and depend on the amount you've used, how often you use, and if you've been using other drugs. Some signs of coming down are:

- Cravings for more gear
- Feeling sad or depressed
- Lack of energy and motivation
- Feeling anxious
- A sense of hopelessness
- Irritable
- Exhaustion
- Hunger
- Wanting to sleep for long periods

Coming down is inevitable – what goes up must come down. Some people will try and avoid coming down by using more gear. This might temporarily relieve some of the feelings associated with coming down, but the more meth you use, the more severe the come down will be in the end.

Some things you can do to make your come down a little more comfortable are:

- Eat, even if you don't feel like it
- Drink water or juice, because it's likely that you'll be dehydrated
- Sleep, to enable your brain, muscles, blood vessels and heart to recover and to function normally again
- Distract yourself by doing something relaxing like watching a movie in a dark room if you can't sleep
- Be kind to yourself and avoid stressful situations until you're feeling back to normal again
- Let people know you are crashing and that you might need some space

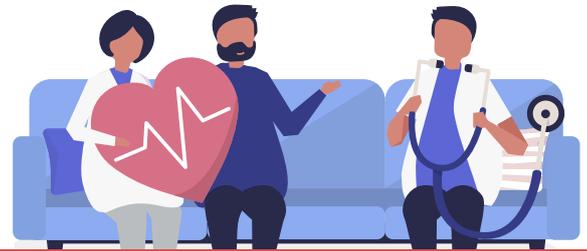
Remember, no matter how intense your cravings are, how depressed or anxious you might feel and how hopeless things may seem, these feelings are temporary and will eventually pass.

SUPPORT

- **Seek help if you feel unwell mentally or physically.**
- Counselling can help you talk through your problems and find solutions to them. Counselling can be provided individually or in a group situation
- Cognitive Behaviour Therapy is proven effective for people who use meth to help reduce or stop using
- Speak to your doctor, alcohol and drug treatment service or local community health service.

THINKING OF STOPPING?

Is it starting to get a bit too much? If you start to feel that the gear is having too much of a negative impact on your life, it might be a good idea to have a chat with the Meth helpline. The **Meth Helpline** offers free, professional drug information, support and talk you about services in your area.



SERVICES AVAILABLE

Lifeline: 13 11 14

24 hour telephone crisis support and suicide prevention service

Alcohol and Drug Support Service: (08) 9442 5000

24 hour telephone counselling and referral

Meth Helpline: 1800 874 878

Telephone counselling

WA AIDS Council: (08) 9482 0000

Counselling services and Needle and Syringe Exchange Program

Hepatitis WA: (08) 9227 9800

Support services and Needle and Syringe Exchange Program

**Next Step Alcohol and Drug Outreach Service at M Clinic
(08) 9227 0734**



Western Australian
AIDS COUNCIL