

Withdrawal from methamphetamine (ice)●

What is withdrawal?

Withdrawal or detoxification (also called detox) is the process of cutting back, or cutting out, the use of a drug. Withdrawal symptoms can range from mild to severe, and differ depending on how long someone has been using, their age, their physical and psychological state and the method of withdrawal. It is important to remember that withdrawal is the first step in a longer journey and that additional, ongoing treatment and support options should be considered as part of the treatment planning.

Dependence

Dependence can be physical, psychological, or both. When a substance is central to a person's life and they have trouble cutting down their use and/or experience symptoms of withdrawal when trying to cut down, they are said to be dependent on that substance.

What can I expect from withdrawal?

Your body will need to adjust to working without methamphetamine in your system, so you may experience a range of symptoms, some minor, some serious, when withdrawing. It can also affect your mental health.

Methamphetamine withdrawal symptoms

Compared to other drugs, methamphetamine has a longer withdrawal. After use a person usually experiences a 'crash period', which can last for about 1 to 3 days, and people may experience extreme fatigue and lethargy (a 'hangover' effect) during this period.

Giving up methamphetamine after using it for a long time can be challenging because the body has to get used to functioning without it. The 'crash' withdrawal phase for methamphetamine lasts for around 1 to 3 days, while the 'acute' withdrawal phase lasts for around 7 to 10 days.

Symptoms can include:

- Cravings for methamphetamine
- Changes in appetite
- Confusion, irritability and mood swings
- Aches and pains
- Exhaustion and fatigue
- Restless sleep and nightmares
- Anxiety, depression and paranoia.

Methamphetamine users who have completed withdrawal may experience ongoing sleep or mood problems and cravings for several months after stopping. These symptoms eventually go away.

Cravings

When someone is dependent on methamphetamine, their brain and body get used to functioning on the drug. If they stop using the drug they may get intense cravings (an overwhelming desire to use the drug). Cravings can come and go and can be triggered by certain situations or circumstances. They are sometimes weak, and sometimes quite strong. People need to learn to manage cravings as they can still occur many years after you have stopped using the drug. Managing cravings involves learning distraction and relaxation techniques such as reading, watching a movie, meditating or exercising. Cravings do eventually resolve, however.

Is withdrawal safe?

Methamphetamine withdrawal is relatively safe and most often occurs at home. However, if a person is using other drugs as well as methamphetamine, has psychotic symptoms, severe depression or other health issues that increase the risk of complications, then it may be safest for them to withdraw under medical supervision. If someone is considering withdrawal, they should discuss this with their doctor or a drug treatment service.

How long will it take to go through withdrawal?

This can depend on many factors, including how long the person has been using methamphetamine, whether other drugs have been used, the person's general health and the setting where the withdrawal takes place.

Generally, it will last from a few days to a few weeks, but some symptoms, such as cravings, sleep problems and mood swings, can continue much longer; in some cases they can last several months.

Where can I go for withdrawal?

It is important to be in a safe and supportive environment if going through withdrawal. Speak to a doctor, health practitioner or a drug and alcohol service for advice on which setting and service would be best for your particular needs. They will probably suggest one of the following:

- Withdrawal at home is usually provided by a team including your doctor, a nurse and a support person such as a friend or family member. This may be a good choice if the withdrawal is not likely to be complicated.
- Outpatient withdrawal may be the best choice if you don't need to be admitted to a residential service. It will involve individual consultations with a health professional over a short period of time, along with ongoing counselling and support.
- Residential withdrawal will involve 5 to 10 days in a residential withdrawal unit or hospital, with staff to help you 24 hours a day. They can help during withdrawal, and afterwards, to prevent relapse. Residential withdrawal may also take place as part of a longer-term rehabilitation program.

Some residential units do not allow any contact with partners, friends or family for a period of time. This helps a person to focus on their treatment, rather than worrying about what is happening at home. It also keeps them out of contact with people who use drugs, as this contact can cause cravings.

Preparing for and during withdrawal

To give yourself the best chance of a successful withdrawal, it is a good idea to take some time to prepare. Doing some preparation before starting withdrawal will give you the best chance of success.

- **Talk with a doctor, or an alcohol and other drugs treatment service,** and make sure you have a support person, and a supportive environment, during the withdrawal process. DirectLine is available 24 hours a day on 1800 888 236.
- **Write down a personal list of reasons for going through withdrawal.** List the advantages and disadvantages of using and giving up the drug. This can help to keep you motivated when the withdrawal seems too hard and you want to give up.
- **Plan for what to do if you end up using drugs during withdrawal.** This does happen sometimes and is a critical stage in treatment. Some people may choose to give up treatment and go back to using the drug, while others think of it as a setback and continue with the withdrawal. It is important to talk about why it happened, what worked well, what did not, and what could be done differently next time.
- **Eat a healthy diet, even though you might crave junk food.** This can reduce mood swings that are often part of withdrawal.
- **Get plenty of sleep.** Regular use of methamphetamine can reduce your energy levels, and you may feel tired for a long time after withdrawal.
- **Stay hydrated by drinking between 1 and 2 litres of water per day,** but not more than 3 litres.
- **Consider a multivitamin supplement** if you are feeling unwell and can't eat much.
- **Keep busy so you don't have time to dwell on negative feelings.** Remember you may not be able to concentrate for long periods, and your memory may not be working very well. Easy activities like watching TV or movies, walks, reading magazines and short trips may be good activities to try.
- **Learn some basic stress management techniques,** such as relaxation, exercise, massage or just talking with others about how you are feeling to help you to overcome anxiety during this time.

How can I help someone through withdrawal?

If you are supporting a friend or family member through the withdrawal process, it's a good idea to do some preparation beforehand.

Understand the process

Talk to the health practitioner supervising the withdrawal to make sure you are clear about your role and understand what you will need to do to help the person through their withdrawal.

Get support for yourself

Have support organised for yourself, and make sure there is someone you can talk to if things get difficult.

DirectLine can direct you to counselling, additional information and referral to services. This service can put you in touch with specialist family help lines and support groups. These are often run by friends and family members of people who use drugs, so they will understand your situation.

Be there during the tough times

- **Try to stay positive** for your friend or family member if they begin to question why they are going through the process. Challenging any illogical thoughts during withdrawal is a very important function of a support person.
- **Encourage them to read through their personal list of reasons for going through withdrawal** if they begin to have unpleasant symptoms, or if they are questioning whether withdrawal was really a good idea.
- **Help them to deal with their relapse** if they begin to use the drug again during withdrawal. It can be useful to make a plan for how they will deal with relapse before they begin withdrawal.
- **Know the rules of the service.** If your friend or family member is preparing for residential withdrawal at a hospital or withdrawal unit, make sure you find out whether there are restrictions on visiting or contacting them, and what items may be brought into the unit.

Other help, support services and resources

If there are concerns about the health or emotional safety of children within the home, check the Child Protection number for your area here: www.dhs.vic.gov.au/for-individuals/children,-families-and-young-people/child-protection/child-protection-contacts

After hours Child Protection Emergency Service • 13 12 78

(5.00pm–9.00am Monday–Friday, 24 hours on weekends and public holidays)

Kids Helpline • 1800 55 1800

Where children are old enough to recognise they would like assistance, or to talk to someone, the Kids Helpline is Australia’s only free, private and confidential phone counselling service specifically for young people aged between 5 and 25.

Victorian AIDS Council • vac.org.au/lgbti-health/alcohol-and-other-drug-services-aod

Links to further help and support • adf.org.au/help-support/

Information on methamphetamine • adf.org.au/drug-facts/ice/

For information on treatment

There are a range of treatment services available to support the recovery from alcohol and drug misuse. To find out more information about treatment services in your area, contact the alcohol and drug intake and assessment service.

ACSO • 1300 022 760

(9am–5pm Monday–Friday)

DirectLine is also available to provide free and confidential information, counselling and referral for alcohol and drug issues 24 hours a day 7 days a week.

DirectLine • 1800 888 236 • www.directline.org.au

Further information

DirectLine • 1800 888 236

Help and support lines (24 hours, 7 days a week)

Ice Advice Line • 1800 423 238

Help and support lines (24 hours, 7 days a week)

Family Drug Help • 1300 660 068 • www.familydrughelp.com.au (Victorian-based)

Services are available to support those around you who may be affected by your drug use. As well as providing understanding, they can provide information about how best to help during treatment.

Family Drug Support • 1300 368 186 • www.fds.org.au (Australia-wide)



Stay informed

 twitter.com/alcoholdrugfdn

 facebook.com/alcoholdrugfdn

Contact us

 1300 85 85 84

adf.org.au

© Alcohol and Drug Foundation 2017

ABN 66 057 731

Disclaimer: The Australian Drug Foundation has used its best endeavours to ensure that material contained in this publication was correct at the time of printing.

The Australian Drug Foundation gives no warranty and accepts no responsibility for the accuracy or completeness of information and reserves the right to make changes without notice at any time in its absolute discretion.

These fact sheets have been developed with funding provided by Murray PHN.