

Ice

What is ice?

Crystal methamphetamine ('ice') is a stimulant drug, which means it speeds up the messages travelling between the brain and the body. It's stronger, more addictive and therefore has more harmful side effects than the powder form of methamphetamine known as 'speed'.

Ice usually comes as small chunky clear crystals that look like ice. It can also come as white or brownish crystal-like powder with a strong smell and bitter taste.

Other names

Crystal meth, shabu, crystal, glass, shard, P.

How is it used?

Ice is generally smoked or injected and the effects can be felt in 3 to 7 seconds. It is sometimes swallowed (15 to 30 minutes to feel the effects) or snorted (3 to 5 minutes to feel the effects).

Effects of ice

There is no safe level of drug use. Use of any drug always carries some risk. It's important to be careful when taking any type of drug.

The effects of ice can last for around 6 hours, but it might be hard to sleep for a few days after using the drug.

Ice affects everyone differently, but effects may include:

- Feelings of pleasure and confidence
- Increased alertness and energy
- Repeating simple things like itching and scratching
- Enlarged pupils and dry mouth
- Teeth grinding and excessive sweating
- Fast heart rate and breathing
- Reduced appetite
- Increased sex drive

Ice is stronger, more addictive and therefore has more harmful side effects than the powder form of methamphetamine known as 'speed'.

Injecting ice and sharing needles can increase the risk of:

- Hepatitis B
- Hepatitis C
- HIV and AIDS

Snorting ice can damage the nasal passage and cause nose bleeds.

Overdose

If a large amount or a strong batch is taken, it could also cause an overdose. If any of the following effects are experienced an ambulance should be called straight away by dialling triple zero (000). Ambulance officers don't need to involve the police.

- Racing heartbeat and chest pain
- Breathing problems
- Fits or uncontrolled jerking
- Extreme agitation, confusion, clumsiness
- Sudden, severe headache
- Unconsciousness
- Stroke, heart attack or death

Coming down

It can take several days to 'come down' from using ice. The following effects may be experienced during this time:

- Difficulty sleeping and exhaustion
- Headaches, dizziness and blurred vision
- Paranoia, hallucinations and confusion
- Irritability and feeling 'down'

Using a depressant drug such as alcohol, benzodiazepines or cannabis to help with the 'come-down' effects may result in a cycle of dependence on both types of drugs.

Long-term effects

With regular use, ice may eventually cause:

- Extreme weight loss due to reduced appetite
- Restless sleep
- Dry mouth and dental problems
- Regular colds or flu
- Trouble concentrating
- Breathlessness
- Muscle stiffness
- Anxiety, paranoia and violence
- Depression
- Heart and kidney problems
- Increased risk of stroke
- Needing to use more to get the same effect
- Dependence on ice
- Financial, work or social problems

Ice psychosis

High doses of ice and frequent use may cause 'ice psychosis'. This condition is characterised by paranoid delusions, hallucinations and bizarre, aggressive or violent behaviour. These symptoms usually disappear a few days after the person stops using ice.

Dependence

People who regularly use ice can quickly become dependent on the drug. They may feel they need ice to go about their normal activities like working, studying and socialising, or just to get through the day.

Mental health problems

Some people who regularly use ice may start to feel less enjoyment of everyday activities. They can get stressed easily and their moods can go up and down quite quickly. These changes can lead to longer-term problems with anxiety and depression. People may feel these effects for at least several weeks or months after they give up ice.

Mixing ice with other drugs

The effects of taking ice with other drugs – including over-the-counter or prescribed medications – can be unpredictable and dangerous, and could cause:

Ice + speed or ecstasy: enormous strain on the heart and other parts of the body, which can lead to stroke.

Ice + alcohol, cannabis or benzodiazepines: enormous strain on the body, and more likely to overdose. The stimulant effects of ice may mask the effects of depressant drugs like benzodiazepines and can increase the risk of overdose.

Withdrawal

Giving up ice after using it for a long time is challenging because the body has to get used to functioning without it. Withdrawal symptoms generally settle down after a week and will mostly disappear after a month. Symptoms can include:

- Cravings for ice
- Increased appetite
- Confusion and irritability
- Aches and pains
- Exhaustion
- Restless sleep and nightmares
- Anxiety, depression and paranoia

Further Information

The Druginfo website has information on:

- Treatment
- The law
- Help and support
- References for this fact sheet

Go to druginfo.adf.org.au

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Level 12, 607 Bourke Street, Melbourne
PO Box 818 North Melbourne Victoria Australia 3051

Email druginfo@adf.org.au Telephone **1300 85 85 84**

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