

Tips for...

Cutting Back or Quitting Methamphetamine

There are many reasons why people decide to cut back on or stop using methamphetamine. Maybe they feel like they're losing control of their use. Maybe in the past they've been able to stabilize their use in a way that maximizes the benefits and minimizes the problems, but now they have noticed an overall switch from positive effects to negative ones.

Most people who take methamphetamine for the first time don't plan to become regular users, and they definitely don't intend to develop a full-blown dependence on the substance. Unfortunately, methamphetamine has a high potential for chronic use because of its pleasurable effects and ready availability. What's more, tolerance to the drug can develop quickly, meaning that people need increasingly larger amounts more often to achieve the same effects.

Trying to cut back on or quit using methamphetamine can be very difficult if a person is not ready to change, or if they are not prepared to experience some discomfort as a result of adjusting their habits.

In general, people withdrawing from methamphetamine will experience the opposite of the effects of the drug. The severity of withdrawal depends on how long

and how much the person used. Physical symptoms, such as extreme tiredness, disturbed sleep, dry mouth, headaches, and hallucinations may last for about five days. The emotional withdrawal symptoms can last for weeks or months. These include depression, anxiety, paranoia, loss of motivation, low energy, and extreme cravings.

If you are committed to making changes to your methamphetamine-use patterns but aren't sure where to start, consider these six practical steps to reducing your use or living methamphetamine-free.

1. Consider your current patterns of use

Think about how much and how often you use methamphetamine in one day, week, or month. Also, think about the form of methamphetamine you're taking, and how you're administering it. Do you smoke it in a cigarette or pipe? Or do you snort, swallow, insert, or inject it? Are you using any other substances with methamphetamine? If so, what are they, and when and how are you using them?

Clarifying your current use patterns will help you determine where you stand on the line between casual and intensive use.



.....
“Trying to cut back on or quit using methamphetamine can be very difficult if you're not ready to change.”

It is also the first step toward assessing whether you're comfortable with your level of involvement.

If you're not sure about your current use patterns, try keeping track in a daily diary for a week or so. Or create a chart, such as the one at the bottom of this page. Since the interaction between substances is important, be sure to record all of the substances you're using. If you're worried about someone finding out about your methamphetamine use, fill in your diary or chart with code words that nobody but you can understand.

2. Think about why you use methamphetamine

If you're using methamphetamine regularly, chances are there are reasons why. Is it to help you stay awake and alert? Does it make you feel better about the things you don't like about your life? Make a list of the things you like about methamphetamine, or the things you look forward to when you think about using it.

Your list might look something like this:

- I like using methamphetamine because it*
- *makes me feel confident and competent,*
 - *helps me concentrate when I have lots of work to do,*
 - *gives me lots of energy,*
 - *helps me lose weight, and*
 - *intensifies my sexual desire.*

3. Make a list of reasons why you want to cut down on or quit using methamphetamine

Now that you've established what you like most about getting high, consider your reason for wanting to change your current use pattern. Is your concentration getting worse? Are your relationships deteriorating? Is your sex life suffering? Is your overall health poorer? Do you feel anxious and shaky? Are you in control of your methamphetamine use, or is the drug controlling you?

Create a list of reasons why you want to change your current habits. Here's an example:

- I want to make some changes because*
- *I feel like I'm not in control of my use anymore—I end up smoking up when I don't really want to,*
 - *I get insomnia sometimes, I'm irritable, and nothing makes me feel good,*
 - *sex was better at first, but now I'm having trouble performing, and*
 - *I'm starting to worry about the things you hear about: dental problems, skin problems, strokes, seizures, paranoia, and psychosis.*

4. Be aware and prepare

Many people who use methamphetamine have a hard time cutting back or quitting,

Weekly Chart

<i>Current Use</i>	<i>Monday</i>	<i>Tuesday</i>	<i>Wednesday</i>	<i>Thursday</i>	<i>Friday</i>	<i>Saturday</i>	<i>Sunday</i>
<i>How often?</i>							
<i>When? What situation?</i>							
<i>How much?</i>							
<i>Method of use</i>							
<i>With other substances?</i>							
<i>Other factors</i>							
<i>Ok or too much?</i>							

but most succeed. Some people can do it on their own, and others need help from friends, family or professionals who deal with dependence issues on a daily basis. Although change can be difficult to create and sustain, you can prepare with some planning. Jot down some things you think may be difficult. Also, think about different ways to support the changes you want to make. You can start by creating a chart that lists Potential Difficulties on one side, and Resources for Support on the other.

5. Make a step-by-step plan to make change happen

Whether you're cutting down or quitting completely, the next step is to turn your decision into a series of practical steps. First, decide which day you're going to begin making the change. Then write down in detail what the change will actually look like. Next, think about the things you can do during those first few weeks of change. If you need to alter your habits with other substances too, it's a good idea to do this at the same time. Next, outline how you'll deal with any withdrawal symptoms or cravings you may get. Finally, think about alternative ways to achieve the benefits you got from your previous pattern of methamphetamine use and how to make a healthy transition. Plan to achieve goals in each of the major areas of your life: family/home, physical, emotional/learning, social/community, activity/occupational, spiritual/ethical. Reaching these goals is a matter of making it happen, rather than just wishing it would. See the Problem Substance Use Workbook on the Here to Help website if you need more help or information.

On this page is a sample plan for someone who wants to quit using methamphetamine because they don't like where their life is heading.

6. Stay positive and stay active

Longer-term and chronic use of methamphetamine can cause changes in the brain. Current evidence shows that many of these changes will reverse over

My plan to quit using methamphetamine

1. July 1 is going to be my first meth-free day.

I'm going to take the first week of July off from work and go to visit my friend who lives out of town. He doesn't do any drugs and is an avid outdoorsman. Before I go away, I'm going to throw out all of my meth paraphernalia so that I won't be reminded of it when I get home. I'm also going to think about who will and won't be able to support the changes I want to make, and only connect with the people who will help me see the changes through.

2. Some things I can do to help myself deal with withdrawal symptoms:

- *be patient—it's going to take time (weeks or months) for my body to adjust to change*
- *avoid sugar, alcohol, and stimulants such as caffeine before bedtime*
- *drink lots of liquids, eat well, and exercise*
- *visit a doctor or go to the hospital if I start having hallucinations or troubling thoughts, or if I get heart palpitations that seem unusually strong*

3. Some things I can do to cope with cravings:

- *talk to someone supportive, such as a friend or sponsor who's already cut down or quit*
- *join a support group or find a counsellor who has experience in the field of addictions by calling 800-663-1441*
- *talk to friends who don't use substances about the ways they cope with long hours at work and other life stresses, and find out what they do in their free time to relax and have fun*
- *exercise and try yoga, relaxation breathing, meditation and alternative therapies, such as acupuncture, healing touch and massage*

4. Some things I can do to help myself achieve a healthy balance:

- *engage in meaningful activities where I don't feel like using methamphetamine*
- *build healthy relationships in which my desire to not use methamphetamine is respected*
- *see a counsellor or find alternative ways to deal with difficult emotions*

5. Review my progress in 3 months (and adjust my plan as needed).

time. However, conditions usually worsen with continued use or a return to use, so it's important to stick with your decision to cut down or quit, even though it may be difficult to follow through.

If you go off your plan one day, don't be too hard on yourself. Think about why it happened, and plan for how you'll handle the same situation if it happens again. Focus on new solutions that will help you stay on track. Give yourself credit for any positive changes you make, even tiny ones. Fill your time with meaningful activities. Try a new hobby that you have always wanted to try. Keep your eyes on your future as you put your plan into practice.

What to do if you or someone you know is experiencing a problem with methamphetamine

For information on treatment options and resources, call:

Alcohol and Drug Information and Referral Service

1-800-663-1441 (throughout BC)
604-660-9382 (in Greater Vancouver)

For more information about methamphetamine and other substances, visit www.heretohelp.bc.ca or www.carbc.ca.

Visit the Here to Help website to access the Problem Substance Use Workbook at this address: <http://heretohelp.bc.ca/sites/default/files/images/psuworkbook.pdf>.

Quick tips for taking control

Opt for a less harmful method of use.

Smoking or injecting methamphetamine can increase your risk of developing tolerance and dependency. Injecting methamphetamine or any other substance can lead to infection, abscesses, and transmission of blood-borne diseases such as STDs, Hepatitis B and C, and HIV. Start changing your habits by switching to snorting, swallowing, or inserting the drug.

Lower your dosage. The most dangerous aspect of using methamphetamine involves the speed with which tolerance to the drug can develop. As doses increase in size over longer periods of time, the danger of dependence also increases. You can decrease the health and safety risks that go with dependence by using less, and using less often.

Make concrete plans. Longer-term use can reduce attention span, concentration, and ability to control impulses. Before getting high, set out the amount you're going to use. Tell yourself you're not going to change your plan and go back for more.

Plan out your drug-free days. The fewer days in a row you use methamphetamine, the better. If you use the drug every day, try cutting back to every other weekday, and try not using at all on weekends. Alternatively, consider using smaller amounts no more than once a week. Plan other ways to spend your time and energy so you don't end up sitting around thinking about how you miss getting high.

Buy less so you use less. Buying large amounts of methamphetamine may be cheaper, but you run the risk of using more than you want to simply because you have lots available. Decide to buy no more than the doses you plan for.

