



P'd off

A guide for people trying to reduce or stop
using methamphetamine

May 2022

Introduction

This booklet is for people who are thinking about slowing down or wanting to stop using methamphetamine – even if just for a while.

Information in this booklet will help you understand what's going on in withdrawal. It also includes suggestions about how to make it easier on yourself and the people around you. You may also find it helpful to talk it over with your doctor or other health care worker.

No booklet can cover everyone's experience of withdrawal as we are all unique, but there is a good chance you will find something useful in here.

The Alcohol Drug Helpline has trained workers available.

Meth Helpline: **0800 6384 4357 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 4pm)**

Alcohol Drug Helpline: **0800 787 797 or free-text 8681 for a confidential reply**

Māori Helpline: **0800 787 798 or free-text 8681 for a confidential reply**

Pasifika Helpline: **0800 787 799 or free-text 8681 for a confidential reply**

Youth Helpline: **0800 787 984 or free-text 8681 for a confidential reply**

You may find counselling, alternative therapies, peer support, and mutual-aid groups such as Narcotics Anonymous (NA) helpful to support you through your withdrawal and afterwards.

NA is a fellowship for people who share experiences, strengths and hopes. NA makes no distinction between drugs (including alcohol) and offers an ongoing support network for people who wish to pursue and maintain a drug-free lifestyle.

With thanks to Turning Point Alcohol and Drug Centre Inc and Nelson Addiction Services for permission to use their material., and CADS Auckland Consumer Team for external review.

Making the decision

You would not have started using methamphetamine if you didn't enjoy it, but like most things you can have too much of a good thing. The downside of any behaviour is different for everybody so it is a good idea to figure out just what's happening that makes you think it's time for you to have a break or quit using.

You may find it helpful to write down what the 'good things' and the 'not so good things' about using. When you can see the pros and cons in black and white it can make it all clearer and easier to make a decision.

Many people find stopping or staying stopped is difficult because even after making the decision they still miss some things about using. This is normal and it takes time to find things to do to fill the gap.

Another reason many people find it difficult is that they forget the 'not so good' things about using meth – why they wanted to stop in the first place. Keeping your list of 'not so good things' handy will be a good reminder.

Whatever your reasons for reducing or stopping are, and whatever your long term goals are, at this point getting through the withdrawal is the job ahead of you.

About methamphetamine withdrawal

What happens to my body during withdrawal?

Most substances used repetitively over time cause changes in the chemistry of our body and brain. Our bodies adapt to having that substance on board and only feel ‘normal’ when using the substance. When you stop using your body has to adjust. This is withdrawal, as your body gets used to working ‘normally’ without the substance. Each substance has different withdrawal symptoms. Some are hardly noticeable while some can be extreme and go on and on.

There are a lot of different things affecting how long and intense your withdrawal will be. This includes:

- › how healthy you are generally
- › if you have any mental health issues
- › your physical health
- › your attitude.

If you expect withdrawal to be hard it will be. Even people with a similar history can have very different experiences of withdrawal.

Common methamphetamine withdrawal symptoms

Between 1 and 3 days: Crash

- › exhaustion
- › long hours asleep
- › depression

Between 2 and 5 days: Withdrawal

- › strong urges to use, cravings
- › mood swings, tearfulness, anxiety, irritability, blah, feeling drained
- › agitation
- › sleep problems
- › poor concentration
- › aches, pains and headaches
- › diarrhoea, hunger
- › paranoia
- › hallucinations

Common

Very uncommon



Between 7 and 28 days: Most symptoms settle but you might still have:

- › mood swings
- › depression
- › sleep problems
- › cravings

After 1 to 3 months: Over time as brain chemistry adjusts:

- › sleep patterns improve
- › energy levels get better
- › mood settles

Things you don't like about methamphetamine

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Things you like about methamphetamine

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8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

At some stage you may wish to tear out this page and burn it, bury it, send it down a river or out to sea. You'll be surprised how good that feels.

Starting off

Before you stop!

Organise a safe place

Trying to stop and going through withdrawal while people around you are using meth is way too hard. You might be able to do it but why make it any harder than it needs to be? Find somewhere to stay where people don't use, such as:

- › a friend or whānau member's home where using friends can't get hold of you
- › a quiet motel
- › if you're staying home, put the word around that you will be away, turn off your phone and don't answer the door
- › tell people you are stopping using meth and for them to keep away for a while.

Organise support

While you could do it on your own, it will probably be easier to go through withdrawal with some support from your whānau, your doctor or other health care worker. You may also want to contact the **Alcohol Drug Helpline (0800 787 797)** now to talk with a specialist who can be available by telephone at those times you really need support throughout the withdrawal. Self help groups such as NA and peer support groups can also provide support.

The people around you need to be supportive, available and aware of what you may go through. If they know what is going on then they can help when it gets hard. Before you start make a list of people you can rely on, but avoid anybody in the scene and people who will just irritate you. If people don't know what meth withdrawal is like it might be good idea to give them this booklet to read. Use your support people to screen phone calls and visitors, and if boredom and loneliness hit.

Planning the days, and the nights

Getting through withdrawal can be easier if you have plans in place for how to use the time every day. While at first you may feel like doing nothing, after a few days you will feel more energetic and it's good to have options about what to do with that energy. Planning a routine (get up at a set time, shower, have breakfast and so on) can help you deal with mood swings and 'cravings'. Making a list of possible things to do that you enjoy, treats for successes, and that help you to relax and avoid using meth can be useful to jog your mind when in withdrawal.

Medication

While some medications can reduce the severity of some withdrawal symptoms, nothing will stop the symptoms completely. There is no 'magic pill' or even combination of medications that is particularly effective in meth withdrawal. Your doctor may be able to support you with medication for sleep for a few nights, if that's a problem, but the quality of sleep will not be the same as natural sleep.

If a problem with depression or anxiety emerges during withdrawal, medication might help you deal with the worst of these feelings, especially if they don't go away over time.

Some alternative or natural therapies can help with some withdrawal symptoms. Some natural products can have unwanted side effects so rather than self medicate it is better to get advice from someone in the know. Your local health store is likely to have a list of alternative or natural therapists.

People that will support you

Things they can do; bring around meals, drive to meetings, help with housework, play cards, talk and listen.

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3. _____

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10. _____

People or places to avoid

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9. _____
10. _____

Things to do during the day and at night

What about; a movie, a massage, reading a book, nice food, a picnic, a walk in the bush or at a beach?

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2. _____

3. _____

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10. _____

Getting through withdrawal

Cravings

Powerful urges to use meth are normal and expected during withdrawal. Cravings:

- › are common
- › are not caused by lack of motivation or willpower
- › come and go and are only intense for short periods, usually less than an hour, though this can feel like forever
- › can be triggered by stress, distress, unhappiness and pain, but will ease over time
- › will get more intense if people start talking about using or use meth in front of you
- › can still happen after withdrawal when triggered by pipes, people, places and moods, but they will become less intense and not last as long.
- › reduce in intensity the longer you go without using meth. If you don't use they will lose power over you.

Dealing with cravings

Cravings are going to happen so get ready for them. Remember they are usually only really intense for short periods of time and if you have a way to get through them they will become less intense and easier to deal with.

Tip 1

When cravings are at their worst you will struggle with the need to use and the desire to not use.

- › The longer it goes on the more anxious you get and the more intense the cravings.
- › Don't fight it just put off the decision for a minute or so at a time – you may use, you may not – that's a decision to make after each minute or so.

Tip 2

Cravings take a lot of energy so getting busy will starve them of fuel.

- › Listen to or make music, draw, do a relaxation exercise, watch a movie, do a jigsaw, exercise or whatever works for you.
- › Being able to concentrate and do complex things can be difficult in withdrawal so don't expect to be able to do anything too complicated.

Tip 3

After an hour the cravings will have changed in strength, and this is a good time to look at the list on page 6 and congratulate yourself for getting through the last hour.

Tip 4

Imagine that cravings are a wave you are surfing and ride it, getting to know what your thoughts are and how your body feels as the wave loses power and washes over you. Get to know your cravings and record them for the future. Don't try to ignore them hoping they will go away.

Sleep problems

After the initial crash you may find it difficult to get to sleep and when you do sleep you could have broken nights with disturbing dreams or nightmares. This happens as your brain and body adjust to no meth.

It can take weeks for the return of normal sleep patterns, especially if you have been using hard out for a long period of time. It is important to remember that sleep problems are normal in withdrawal and that it will get better.

This will be hard to remember on those nights when you get hardly any sleep, but eventually your body will demand sleep and you will sleep.

How to help yourself sleep better

- › Go to bed only when sleepy.
- › Apart from sex your bed is for sleeping, not reading or watching movies.
- › If you don't fall asleep after 30 minutes get up, go to another room and do something that does not require much concentration. Go back to bed when you feel sleepy... repeat as necessary till asleep within 30 minutes.
- › Get up at the same time every morning no matter how long you have slept to train your body to use the time in bed for sleep.
- › Don't nap during the day.
- › Don't allow yourself to fall asleep during relaxation exercises during the day but use them in bed to get to sleep at night.
- › Get some exercise during the day and get tired out, whatever you have enjoyed in the past will be easiest.
- › Rather than thinking and worrying in bed write down what's on your mind during the day and when you go to bed you can say to yourself, "it's sorted, it's time to sleep". Repeat as needed.
- › Avoid coffee, caffeine drinks, energy drinks and cigarettes, especially at night, as they are all stimulants and will make it harder to get to sleep.
- › Small amounts of alcohol can knock you out, but only for a while after which you will be wide awake.
- › Hot drinks like chamomile tea, hot milk and some relaxing teas can help at night to get to sleep.
- › Health Food shops have a range of products to help with relaxation and sleep. Many of these contain Valerian and or Kava Kava as ingredients so avoid if you have liver disease. Tart Cherry juice helps readjust body clocks and encourages natural sleep patterns, but it is expensive. 5-hydroxytryptophan (5-HTP) helps with sleep and relaxation but should not be used with antidepressants or St John's Wort.
- › Medications such as zopiclone and benzodiazepines will knock you out but your body won't readjust to its natural rhythms. After 1 – 2 weeks your body adapts to them and when you stop taking them, it's back to where you started.
- › Some low dose antidepressant medications can also help reduce anxiety and improve sleep. However they can have unpleasant side effects and are dangerous in high doses and need to be used under supervision.

How to relax

It's common to get agitated and irritable during withdrawal so knowing how to relax is very helpful. There are a lot of ways to relax and most of us normally use a range like, listening to music, watching TV, reading a book, having a warm bath or going for a walk with a friend.

Sometimes however our usual ways of relaxing are not enough, and it helps to have a specific method to help you wind down when really tense.

Try this

Lie down or sit in a comfortable chair in a room where you will not get interrupted. Take your shoes off and loosen any tight clothing. Close your eyes and pay attention to your breathing.

Start to breathe slowly and take air down towards your stomach. Hold your breath for 4 – 5 seconds, then breathe out slowly, emptying your lungs as far as possible. Repeat this for the next 5 minutes.

After several minutes of concentrating on your breathing start individually tensing each part of your body while breathing in, then hold your breath and muscle tension for 10 seconds before breathing out while relaxing your muscles.

Start by tensing your toes, hold your breath then breathe out while untensing. Move onto your feet then your calves, thighs, buttocks, stomach, arms, shoulders and then your jaw. Finish up by tensing your whole body.

After this imagine yourself in a place you know well that is calm and peaceful. Try to imagine the place, the sounds of it and the feel of being there, keeping your breathing steady. Enjoy for as long as you want. When you are ready open your eyes, while staying relaxed and alert.

Generally paying attention to your breathing is a great way to reduce anxiety and stop it running away with you. A simple breathing technique is to count to 3 as you breathe in, hold for a second or two, then count to 3 as you breathe out. Keep this up until your heart rate slows down.

Dealing with aches and pains

Aches, pains and headaches are caused by increased muscle tension during withdrawal and usually only lasts 1 – 2 weeks. They can be eased by:

- › Warm baths, spas or saunas
- › Massages from whānau or friends
- › Light exercise like yoga, walking, swimming or stretches
- › Medication, such as aspirin and paracetemol, can help but overuse can be dangerous.

Mood swings

At times you will feel exhausted, lethargic and unmotivated to do anything. At other times you will feel restless, agitated, anxious, irritable, reactive and angry. This is normal in meth withdrawal.

Being aware that the mood swings are a normal part of withdrawal will help you make sense of how you are feeling. Relaxation techniques can also help as can regular exercise, a good diet and sleep.

While for most people these mood swings will pass quickly, depression can become a major problem for some people. If low mood persists past three weeks talk to your doctor or other health worker.

Paranoia

Paranoia is common while using meth but it can also be a problem during withdrawal. Having these thoughts does not mean you are going mad and they will generally fade away as long as you don't use. If they do get worse then you need to talk about them with your doctor or another health worker.

Diet

Meth does nothing for your appetite and many people lose a lot of weight. To help get healthy you need to start to eat well again, preferably fresh fruit, vegetables and lots of protein. A multi vitamin can help get back on top.

It's also good to drink lots of fluids that don't contain caffeine, sugar or alcohol. Drinking a lot of water and fruit or vegetable juices helps flush toxins out through your kidneys.

It's too hard

Sometimes withdrawal feels like it will just never end. The end may be a couple of days away or it may be a couple of weeks away but while you are in withdrawal that just seems like forever.

The best way to deal with these thoughts is to stop thinking about the next few days or weeks and focus your thoughts on now. Can I make it to tomorrow without using meth? If that's too far away, can I get through the next hour without using meth?

Break up the withdrawal into short periods and deal with each bit as it happens.

If you get part way through withdrawal and feel like you can't go on, remind yourself that you have survived the last few days without using. Whatever you have been doing has been working, so keep doing it.

Sometimes to get through these hard times it can be helpful to talk to someone else. This could be your doctor, the Alcohol Drug Helpline, a health worker or someone from NA, peer support or your local addiction service.

Traps

Using alcohol, benzos, opiates or cannabis to help you get through withdrawal is really risky. It is very easy to see-saw from one substance to another. Just because alcohol is legal does not mean it is a 'safer' substance to use. Withdrawal is about your body and brain getting back into kilter without having meth in your system. Using something else instead won't help your body get back to normal.

After withdrawal

One day you will realise that you feel much better and that you are through the worst of it. It's a good idea to have a plan about how to treat yourself for having made it this far, something that does not involve using meth of course.

Now's the time to think about what to do next. It can help to talk to someone about your options, especially if you want to keep off methamphetamine. This could include a counsellor, friends, whānau, a peer support group or NA. You may decide to go to a rehab or move away from your using mates. It is important to plan your next moves carefully as parts of your life will be very different now you are not using. A good plan will help you deal with stress without meth.

What happens if you have a 'slip'?

Giving up meth is not easy. Staying off is hard and many people have a slip and use at some stage. This does not mean that they have failed and it is important not to beat yourself up if it happens to you. A slip does not mean you have returned to old patterns.

A slip is a chance to learn more about what triggers using meth for you. This can help you make changes in your life that help you avoid using meth in the future. Sometimes it takes a few goes to get it right but it will happen.

Remember if you do use meth again it will be almost like it was when you first used and it's very easy to overdose, especially if you also use alcohol or other drugs at the same time.

If you need more help

The Alcohol Drug Helpline can provide ongoing support and contact details for your nearest addiction service.

Call the Alcohol Drug Helpline for information on what support groups and peer support is available in your local area, or go to the service directory on the website.

Alcohol Drug Helpline: **0800 787 797** and www.alcoholdrughelp.org.nz

The Level: www.thelevel.org.nz

Narcotics Anonymous call **0800 628 632** or visit www.nzna.org

Alcoholics Anonymous call **0800 229 6757** or visit www.aa.org.nz

OutLine is a rainbow organisation and provides confidential, free, all-ages support from rainbow specialist counsellors and trans peer support: www.outline.org.nz

Family Drug Support provides support for family, whānau and friends: **0800 337 877** (9am-10pm, 7 days a week) or visit www.fds.org.nz



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My thoughts, notes and reflections



