

# Understanding use of methamphetamine

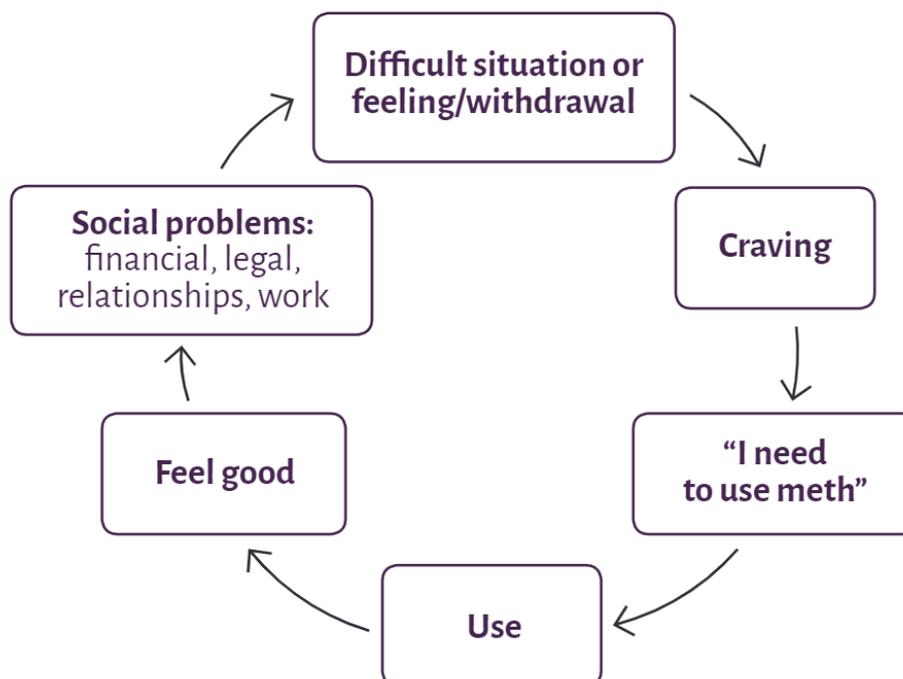
*Adapted from Interventions and Treatment for Problematic Use of Methamphetamine and [www.getselfhelp.co.uk](http://www.getselfhelp.co.uk)*

Repeatedly using most substances changes our body and brain. In the case of methamphetamine, the changes can include memory and concentration problems as well as low mood, irritability, and for some people paranoia and psychosis.

When someone uses methamphetamine regularly, over time the body adapts to having methamphetamine and the person only feels 'normal' when using it. When a person stops they can have a range of unpleasant physical and emotional reactions. This is called withdrawal and creates a strong urge to use again.

Like many substances, most people start using methamphetamine socially, for fun and/or extra energy. For some it becomes a way of helping them to cope with work demands, difficult situations or feelings.

There are both physical and emotional reasons that keep people continue using methamphetamine, as shown below.



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Whānau often hear people who use methamphetamine saying they want to slow down, but don't see any change. This is frustrating and whānau often stop believing the person really wants to slow down or stop. However, most people who use methamphetamine do reach a point where they make a decision to stop using. When that time comes, the person has a much better chance of being able to reduce or stop.

Supporting someone who is in withdrawal can be challenging, but you can make a huge difference through your support.

## Supporting someone decide to reduce or stop

Stopping use of methamphetamine can be a hard decision to make and stick with. People are often very much in two minds about it, for example they know they want to but it seems impossibly hard. Repeatedly telling someone to stop using, threatening them about what will happen if they don't, or withdrawing affection doesn't help someone stop. Often it will make them more likely to continue.

- If they talk about their use, asking them about what they think the advantages and disadvantages of both stopping and not stopping can be really helpful. This often helps people to sort out more clearly in their own minds their own reasons to reduce or stop rather than someone else telling them why.

If the person has cut down or stopped methamphetamine before, even for a short while, reminding them of this and asking them how they did it can often help.

## Helping people through withdrawal

### Practical help

There are really practical things you can do that can make a big difference.

- People who use methamphetamine often have no appetite and supporting them starting to eat properly again can help them feel better. Fresh fruit, vegetables and lots of protein often helps
- After the crash: Encouraging them to exercise or even exercising with them. This will distract them from the unpleasant effects of withdrawal and may also help them to feel better
- Doing things with them helps to distract the person from the unpleasant effects and provide another interest. In the first few days it may be very difficult for the person to do much, but after that they will have more energy
- Sleep is often poor in withdrawal. Spending some time with them at nights, just a few minutes, can be helpful.

### Helping to keep their mood up

- Remember to celebrate steps forward to help them see the successes. Each day using less or without using methamphetamine is a significant success! Acknowledge how far they have come
- Withdrawal can be really tough work. In the difficult times it can be helpful to remind the person why they decided to reduce or stop using methamphetamine
- In the tough times you can reassure them that, while it feels awful now, it will get better.

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## Keeping an eye out

- If the person you are helping starts to get paranoid (not just being angry and irritable) or has hallucinations that keep going, it is important they talk to their doctor or a mental health or addiction specialist. Contact their doctor or the crisis team in your area
- During withdrawal and afterwards people often get quite sad and down. This is normal, but if you think it is going on too long, weeks, or that they are really down talk to their doctor or the local crisis team.

## Further information and help

- Alcohol Drug Helpline: Call **0800 787 797** or text 8681 to speak to a trained counsellor 24 hours a day
  - Pasifika Line **0800 787 799**
  - Māori Line **0800 787 798**
- Meth Help is a phone counselling service with the ability to offer some face to face appointments in Christchurch: **0800 METH HELP (0800 6384 4357)** Monday to Friday
- [www.drughelp.org.nz](http://www.drughelp.org.nz)
- For whānau support call Family Drug Support **0800 337 877** or visit their website [www.fds.org.nz](http://www.fds.org.nz)
- NZ Drug Foundation offers tools and advice for people who use drugs, their whānau and friends and communities impacted by alcohol and other drug use [www.drugfoundation.org.nz](http://www.drugfoundation.org.nz)
- Drug Help gives tools and high quality information about drugs and their potential harms
- The Level offers practical advice for reducing drug and alcohol use [www.thelevel.org.nz](http://www.thelevel.org.nz)