

## Meth Mouth

Methamphetamine is a chemical with stimulant properties similar to adrenaline. It may be snorted, smoked or injected. Meth, like adrenaline, increases heart rate, blood pressure, breathing rate, constricts blood vessels, dilates pupils, releases sugar and fat into the blood stream and energizes the brain. Amphetamines act as an appetite suppressant while producing feelings of well being, exhilaration or euphoria. Meth can also invoke feelings of increased alertness, anger, fear, or agitation. Crystal meth is known by several different names – crank, crystal, speed, chalk and produces a “high” that lasts much longer than a crack cocaine high; 12 hours versus one hour. Like all addictive drugs, meth produces an initial pleasurable effect followed by a rebound unpleasant effect.

Various reports link the tooth decay associated with meth to the acidic and corrosive effects of the chemicals found in the drug, such as anhydrous ammonia (found in fertilizers), red phosphorus (found on matchboxes) and lithium (found in batteries), which when smoked or snorted might erode the tooth’s protective enamel coating; however, it’s more likely that this degree of tooth decay is brought on by a combination of drug-induced mental and physical changes resulting in xerostomia (dry mouth), extended periods of poor oral hygiene, frequent consumption of high calorie, carbonated beverages and tooth grinding and clenching.

Some users describe their teeth as “blackened, stained, rotting, crumbling or falling apart.” The extent of tooth decay varies widely among meth users. A 2000 report in the *Journal of Periodontology* found that users who snorted the drug had significantly worse tooth decay than users who smoked or injected it, although all types of users suffered from dental problems. Often, the teeth cannot be salvaged and must be extracted. Visit a CDA member dentist for a complete exam and to discuss treatment options.

If you use methamphetamine or know someone who does, a visit to a primary care physician is recommended as soon as possible.

