

# The Truth About Meth and Oral Health

## There Is Hope for Recovery

Your dentist and dental hygienist want you to know about the dangers of methamphetamine and how it can harm a person's health. They asked me to share my story of meth addiction and recovery with you. If you know someone who is thinking of using or has used meth, please share this information—it could save the person from the pain of addiction or offer hope for recovery.

Ice  
Chalk  
tweak  
Crystal

### Why do people use meth?

I'm an eighteen-year-old recovering meth addict. I started taking meth because it made me feel attractive, energetic, and confident. Soon I had to take more of it to feel good. Without meth, I started to feel tired, paranoid, depressed, and anxious. I lost my "straight" (clean and sober) friends, but I didn't care. One day I looked in the mirror and my cheeks were thin and my teeth were broken. I didn't feel good anymore. Eventually I hit rock bottom. I wanted to quit using meth and get my life back. I found help from an addiction treatment center. I learned that no matter how badly a person is addicted to meth, every person can recover.

### How does meth hurt people?

When I took meth, I felt a false sense of energy that pushed my body faster than it was meant to go. Even if you are young and healthy, using meth increases your heart rate and blood pressure, and could cause you to have a stroke that could leave you harmed for life. Meth can even kill you. If you inject it, a dirty needle could transmit a disease like hepatitis or HIV/AIDS.

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### How does meth use cause tooth decay?

When I was using, I ground my teeth and I often forgot to do normal things like wash my face or brush and floss my teeth. Meth made me thirsty, and I drank lots of soft drinks instead of water, which only made my tooth decay worse.

If you know someone with tooth decay from meth use, suggest that the person drink water instead of soft drinks, floss and brush at least twice a day (brush for at least two minutes each time). If possible, use fluoride toothpaste. A mouthguard can cut down on the damage from tooth grinding. (You can buy a sports mouthguard at a retail store.) These things can reduce the oral damage while the person is getting help to quit using meth.

### Can meth-related tooth decay be treated?

At first, I was afraid to see a dentist because I looked terrible. My teeth were brown and a few were broken. After I quit using meth, I wanted to fix my teeth. My dentist and dental hygienist were supportive. They didn't make me feel bad about my past drug use. They came up with a plan to repair my teeth so that I could smile again. Dental treatment can include fluoride, deep cleaning, and root canals, and in some cases teeth will need to be pulled and replaced with a denture.

### Help a friend quit using meth.

If you know someone in crisis who needs help quitting meth or other drugs, call the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration at 800-273-8255 to locate the nearest addiction treatment center.

glass  
**FIRE**  
CRANK  
**SPEED**

This text does not depict a specific person; it represents the common experience of meth addicts.

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## Protocol for Treating a Patient with Meth-Related Oral Decay

### Signs of oral decay from meth use:

- rampant Class V caries throughout the mouth
- caries starting at the gumline and appearing to envelop the entire buccal or labial surface
- teeth broken off at the gingival margin
- heavy signs of bruxism; irregular, jagged, worn edges
- grayish-brown teeth; hard enamel reduced to a soft, leathery texture
- xerostomia
- gingivitis and acute periodontitis

### Protocol for treating a patient with meth-affected teeth:

- Take a medical history. Ask questions about drug use.
- Discuss the potential for drug interactions (with dental sedatives) and rule out possible contraindications.
- Be aware that administering nitrous oxide or prescribing narcotics could endanger a recovering person's sobriety.
- Discuss meth's dangers, including damage to dental and physical health.
- Offer education on oral hygiene: flossing and brushing for two minutes at least twice daily and regular dental checkups.
- Advise a balanced diet; recommend water instead of sugary beverages and diuretics, such as caffeine, tobacco, and alcoholic beverages, which can exaggerate xerostomia.
- Explain the best dental treatment option.
- Suggest a mouthguard for patients with bruxism.
- Important: Use concentrated fluoride and remineralizing treatments to reduce demineralization of affected teeth.
- If the patient is still using meth, offer a referral to a local substance abuse treatment center. Send the message that healing from meth addiction is possible.

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Fill in contact info for the primary addiction treatment center in your area.

### Questions to ask a patient:

- Have you ever had dry mouth?
- Do you eat lots of sweets or drink sugary soft drinks?
- Do you clench and grind your teeth?
- Can you think of any reason why your oral health has worsened?
- Sometimes we see this type of decay in people who have used meth in the past—have you used meth?

### Ask these questions to help reveal barriers to dental treatment:

- Do you have trouble getting to and from appointments?
- Would you like an interpreter present at appointments?
- Is the cost of financing your treatment a factor?
- Do you feel confident that I understand your oral health needs?
- Do you understand and agree with the treatment strategy?
- Can your family or friends support you in completing the dental treatment?
- Once the treatment plan is complete, are you committed to staying off drugs and doing daily oral hygiene?