



Changing Lives, Minds, and
Communities through Jesus Christ

The New Ice Age

by Zoe Sandvig

I knew many ‘speed freaks,’ but they’re all dead now. It’s a beautiful high, but it’ll kill you.
—A prisoner writing in *Fortune News*

You can call it “speed,” “glass,” “crank,” “chalk,” “Tina,” and “ice.” If the numbers prove true, you have either experimented with it yourself or know someone who has. It’s crystal meth and it is sliding its way into every crack of America.

First synthesized in Germany in 1887, amphetamine (meth’s base form) hovered under the surface until the 1920s when scientists began investigating it as a possible cure for everything from depression to congestion. During World War II, soldiers took frequent doses to stay fit to fight. In the 1950s doctors began prescribing it as a diet pill and an antidepressant.

Then meth hit the streets illegally. In the eighties it was discovered by the California beach crowd, then made its way to rural white Midwestern communities. Today it has developed close friends in just about every social group—inner-city gangs, high school kids, and soccer moms. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, an estimated 12 million Americans between the ages of 12 and 34 have tried meth at least once.

But what you really need to know about crystal meth is that it is far more than a fad—it is a grisly addiction that could easily rob you of your health, your sanity, and even your family. In 2001 crystal meth sent more people to the nation’s emergency rooms than any other club drug.

In 2005 *Newsweek* labeled it “America’s Most

Dangerous Drug,” and *WebMD* declared meth use an “epidemic.”

Known as “poor man’s heroin,” meth has skyrocketed in the past 15 years because of the ready accessibility and relative low cost of many of its ingredients: battery acid, fertilizer, drain cleaner, Red Devil Lye, anti-freeze, Coleman fuel, and red phosphorus. Its key ingredient—pseudoephedrine (a nasal decongestant found in many over-the-counter cold medicines)—is harder to obtain, especially since Congress passed the Methamphetamine Control Act in 1996, which restricted the sale of the chemical. But serious addicts can always track down enough of the ingredient to meet their fix.

Why, then, do so many people find this drug so attractive? Maybe because it:

- Creates a euphoric rush (that is, makes you feel happy)
- Heightens sexual urges, making most people capable of more sex for longer
- Energizes and increases productivity
- Produces weight loss

Okay . . . So, what’s the problem? Maybe more than you realize.

A Recipe for Destruction

You see, crystal meth floods the midbrain (the parts of your brain that have control over your personality, disposition, attitude, temper, sex drive, sleep cycle, and appetite) with large amounts of the chemical dopamine. This initially increases your blood pressure, heart rate, respiration, and body temperature.

But when the high eventually wears off, the dopamine levels plummet, leaving you achy, depressed, fatigued, irritable, restless, confused, shaky, and hungry.

Over time, the drug literally destroys your brain’s receptors, so that you need increasingly larger doses in order to get your fix. In fact, heavy users cannot even get high anymore. Long-term users can actually develop permanent holes in their brain. But by that time you are spending all of your time managing the side-effects—insomnia, anorexia, a loss of appetite, tremors, and damage to the heart, liver, kidney, and lungs. Many addicts also develop painful sores from picking away at imaginary “meth bugs” (a constant itchy sensation) underneath the skin.

Use of the drug also takes a real toll on your dental hygiene. “Meth mouth” is one of the most common byproducts of abuse. Meth reduces proper blood supply to the gums, hinders saliva production, and dissolves tooth enamel. These three factors, combined with a poor diet and teeth-grinding, create the perfect recipe for decay.

In addition to all that, meth abuse can drive the user—literally—crazy. It is not uncommon for heavy meth users to suffer from extreme paranoia, hallucinations, panic attacks, and even schizophrenia.

Mary Holley, a medical professional, founded Mothers Against Methamphetamine after she lost her brother, Jim, to meth-induced suicide. Jim first began experimenting with crystal meth when he was 22. Once addicted, he became delusional and paranoid. He worked 12 jobs in 12 months. He lost all interest in the things that he loved—music, his motorcycle, etc. Then he began hallucinating,

convinced that the cops and drug dealers were after him. He survived his first suicide attempt, but he tried again about a month later and succeeded.

A Brutal Accomplice

Even if it doesn't kill you, it could cost you your job, your family, or your freedom. Meth addiction frequently leads to child abuse, marital strife, automobile accidents, and unemployment. It can even trigger crime.

William White was a good student, the editor of his high school paper, an athlete, and a Big Brother. But one September day, he was arrested for arson. His accomplice: crystal meth.

The FBI reported a 2.5 percent increase in violent crimes for 2005. Police in many states, such as Oklahoma, Missouri, and Mississippi, blame crystal meth. In Oregon, police attribute a wave of car thefts and increased youth crime to the drug.

According to a report by *MSNBC*, 87 percent of law enforcement agencies in 45 states noticed increased meth-related arrests starting in 2002. Seventy percent blame meth for higher robbery and burglary rates. And 62 percent connect it to frightening increases in domestic violence. And although, according to the Office of National Drug Control Policy, workplace drug screenings reveal a drop in meth rates over the past two years, the meth craze is far from extinct.

Cracking the Surface

Heard enough? Want some good news? Well, I've got some—recovery is possible! While it is no easy job loosening yourself from meth's white-knuckled grip, many former addicts have found true healing.

Take, for example, Jeff Bodine from Alabama. Jeff's meth addiction lasted 17 long years, during which he went to jail, got married, got divorced, lost his home, and then went to jail again. He lost 45 pounds. And his paranoid delusions kept him locked up inside of his house or car 24/7.

"I was at the point of completely losing all of it. I believed that I was completely alone.

Everybody was out to get me," Jeff recalls.

During his second stint in jail, he realized that he wanted to change, but simply did not know how. On his first night back on the streets, he attended a Narcotics Anonymous meeting, where he openly acknowledged that he had a very big problem. From that point forward, he beat his addiction by relying upon God's strength to help him remain clean. He also began actively developing a more positive social circle.

"When I got clean, I got to let everybody go. Period. If you hang around with wise men, you'll be wise. If you're hanging around with evil men, you'll be evil."

Four years clean, Jeff is remarried, has three daughters, and is starting his own transitional house for recovering addicts and ex-offenders. Jeff says that he can sense if an addict stands a chance at recovery by his or her desire to really change.

"You can't force anybody to want to change," he asserts. "You can show them the light, but it doesn't mean that they are gonna accept you."

Do you want to change? Here's the low-down:

- Recognize you have a problem.
- Enroll in a substance abuse program at your facility. Most prisons offer drug abuse classes.
- Don't stop there. Be sure to join a transitional house or NA program immediately after you leave prison.
- Be patient. Full recovery usually takes about a year and a half.

Here are a few things that every recovering meth addict should know:

When you're 12 to 18 months clean, new connections will begin to form in your brain. Your eating and sleeping habits will likely improve. Nightmares, delusions, and panic attacks will decrease. Your old personality and sense of humor will probably return, and 90 percent of any psychosis will disappear. And you may be able to start rebuilding relationships with your children or spouse.

But you will always have to consciously work to force yourself to steer clear of the triggers—anything that reminds you of your former addiction. It may be an old friend, a certain song you used to get high to, alcohol, a syringe, or even pornography. Triggers can easily pull you back into meth's ugly grip. And even if you manage to avoid all those triggers, you may still end up suffering from permanent memory loss, irritability, or tremors (especially at the corner of the eye or the back of the throat).

The Real "Ice" Breaker

Several years ago Dr. Phil interviewed an angry young man whose life was crumbling all around him because of his drug addiction. His parents, heartbroken by their son's death-threatening lifestyle, forced him into a rehab program. Fifty days later, he demonstrated remarkable improvement. Soon after that, he enrolled in a college program and began pursuing a career in acting.

Sadly, several months later, he relapsed and landed in jail, convinced that he was the ultimate failure. Maybe he was.

You see, until this young man seeks out Someone greater than his own willpower, he will always fail.

Sure, he may find a way to keep himself clean for three months, two years—or maybe even a lifetime. But this does not solve the ultimate problem. This young man may find a way to conquer his drug addiction on his own, but he will never be able to conquer his aching, empty heart. St. Augustine wrote: "Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in thee."

We can try to solve our drug problems with much harsher rehab programs and even stricter drug laws, but in the end they will accomplish very little until we are willing to recognize that what we really have to deal with is a "heart" problem. Only then, can we come face to face with Jesus Christ—the ultimate "Ice" breaker.

Copyright © 2008 by Prison Fellowship