



You may have heard about it, but what is it?

Methamphetamine (meth) use is becoming a growing problem among today's teens and young adults. This highly addictive and illegal drug is created in illegal labs from an extremely toxic combination of materials that could include pseudophedrine, hydrochloric acid, battery acid and antifreeze, among other materials. These components alone are enough to be hazardous to a person, but together they are extremely dangerous to the body. Because of the recent growth in popularity of the drug, dentists are only now beginning to recognize its effect on the mouth.

YOUR TEETH ON METH

When meth is smoked, the destruction to the teeth is especially extensive: It produces highly toxic and corrosive vapors that cover the teeth and break down the enamel.

"Meth mouth" is the effect of its corrosive components on the mouth of a user. It begins as black, extensive decay around the gum line. The enamel of the teeth then becomes extremely brittle and decalcified. Eventually, rapid decay takes over and only root stumps of teeth remain. The rotting and crumbling of the teeth becomes so invasive that after a year of smoking meth, dentures are often a patient's only option.

DRUG OF DESTRUCTION

There are many reasons that meth is so destructive to the mouth. In addition to the toxic materials it's made of, it also reduces saliva, causing the user to crave liquids. Most choose to drink soda, which adds to the drug's high and temporarily reduces mouth dryness. Of course, soda destroys the teeth as well, and with the enamel already broken down, can quickly wear away the teeth. With nutrition a low priority compared to the addiction, users don't eat enough to neutralize the soda. The eventual effect is total tooth loss.

Because of the danger that meth use poses both to the mouth and the body, it will continue to be monitored by those in the field of dentistry.

For information on the TRICARE Dental Program, or to find more "Dental Health 101" tips, visit us online at www.TRICAREdentalprogram.com.