

# Crystal Methamphetamine Lived Experience

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# Angela's Story

My name is Angela, I am 46 years old. I have 3 adult children and a grandson. This is my story.

I started using when I was about 28 maybe 29. I had left my children's father and had nowhere to go so I had to move in with my mother, an abusive alcoholic. I started spiraling out of control hanging out with people who had no jobs, and they partied all day. I felt like my life was over. Living with my mother was a bad move, as she was verbally and physically abusive. I started snorting cocaine with my friends and I noticed that I didn't care about anything anymore. So I started doing it more and more. Eventually it started impacting my life. I left my moms after she told me I was the biggest mistake she ever made and I never looked back. I left my job, my kids.... Literally my whole life, just so I wouldn't feel anymore.

I switched from snorting lines to smoking crack not long after I started using. My life switched from working 2 jobs and having my kids in my life, to becoming a drug user on the streets hustling to get more dope. Eventually, I started dealing drugs to support my habit.

The only time I tried to get clean other than this time around was in July 2012 when I was facing charges for possession and trafficking. I had an option to go to Drug Treatment Court and change my life. I graduated that program in August 2013 and ended up pleading guilty and getting a 6 month conditional sentence order. It worked somewhat for me, but I feel like keeping the people that were still using drugs in my inner circle.... I was bound to relapse. So, no. DTC did not work for me because I didn't let it.

I wasn't given any medications to stop using. There are no medications to help keep people from using cocaine. But in 2014, there was a "drought" for cocaine in the city. My dealer only had crystal meth. At this point in my 'using career', I had only tried crystal meth once before. It was years prior and my friend made me snort a line of it. This time I was shown how to smoke it. It tasted nasty. I didn't feel anything. I didn't see the point of doing a drug that you don't feel the rush from like when you smoke crack. Shortly after that I started using it intravenously. This began my relapse of 6 years. During those 6 years, I tried many different drugs and loved them all. I discovered fentanyl, and I fell in love. This was the beginning of my end. Yes the crystal meth got me to stop using cocaine, but now I had an even worse addiction to fentanyl and meth.

In September/October 2020, I had tried to detox myself off of the fentanyl, 5 times cold turkey. I couldn't stay away from it, but I knew I was done with living that way. I decided to pack up all of my things from where I was staying and I went to my cousin's and called my doctor, Dr. Alexander Wong and I told him I needed help. I was 4 days clean from using fentanyl at that point. That night I tried to overdose. When I woke up the next morning I went to the doctor and I haven't looked back.

I have been sober since October 15th, 2020. As of the day I type this, I am 1027 days clean from cocaine, crystal meth and fentanyl and all of the other drugs I have tried. (With the exception of smoking marijuana.) 2 years, 9 months and 24 days

# Quick Facts

## Increased Use of Stimulants

Canadian's use of cocaine in the last year Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction. 2022.

0.9% in 2013

2.5% in 2017

Meth use in BC, proportion of harm reduction survey respondents Davis, Amlani, Buxton 2016.

20% in the 2012

47% in the 2015

## More Stimulants in Coroner Cases BC Coroner Service 2021

48% of illicit drug toxicity deaths had cocaine in 2021

39% of illicit drug toxicity deaths had amphetamine or meth in 2021

## More Fentanyl in Expected Stimulant Samples in 2020/2021 BC Centre on Substance Use. Unpublished drug checking data. 2020.

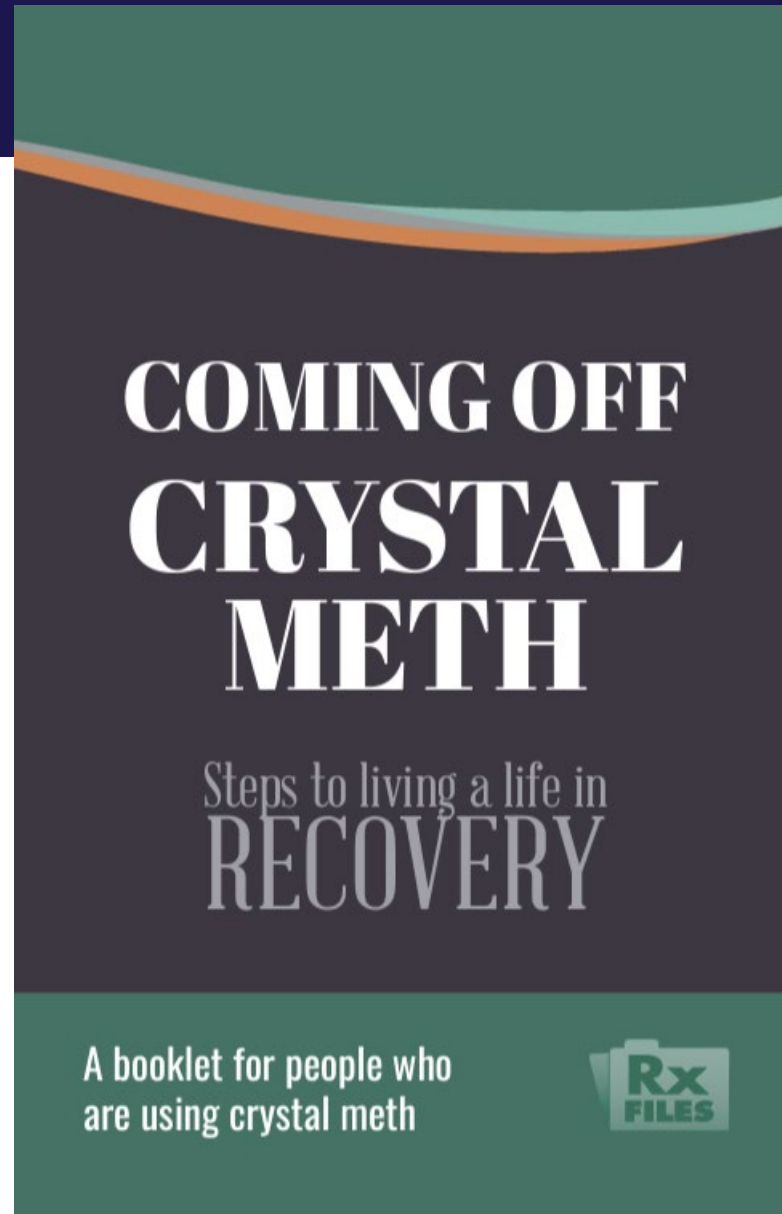
In 4.1% of all crack cocaine samples

In 6.5% of all meth samples

# Resources

## RxFiles

<https://www.rxfiles.ca/rxfiles/uploads/documents/crystalmeth-patient-booklet.pdf>



# Intoxication

## Acute Stimulant Intoxication

- Mania
- Psychosis
- Paranoia
- Delirium
- Hypertension
- Chest pain
- Agitation
- Sweating
- Skin-picking
- Abnormal movements

Sometimes it's reassuring to know that you're not crazy - it's the drugs.

### ...ON MIND & MOOD

irritable, nervous, stressed, mood swings, impulsive, panic, seeing/hearing things (hallucinations), paranoid, depressed, feeling like harming yourself, extremely tired - but can't sleep

Nosebleeds (with snorting)

Dental problems or "meth mouth"

Risk of heart attack

Risk of kidney damage

Skin: makes you look older than you really are

Body begins to smell bad, like chemicals

Brain changes - unable to feel good without the drug

Upset stomach, stomach pain

Hands & legs: shaking, not working properly

Very bad infections

Skin sores and scabs that can leave scars; feeling like bugs are under the skin

### ...ON BODY

### ...ON LIFE

risk-taking behaviour, threats to your safety, losing your job and/or home, loss of family and friends, forced to do things you don't want to do to get drugs (sex for money or drugs, theft, assault/murder), jail/prison

<https://www.rxfiles.ca/rxfiles/uploads/documents/crystalmeth-patient-booklet.pdf>






## Taking the first step.

### FEELING REALLY ROUGH

	First few days	First 1-2 weeks
	• Needing to sleep a lot	• Poor sleep
	• Aches, pains & headaches	
	• Anxiety, panic, and fear • Being agitated and irritable	• Mood swings and depression
	• Exhaustion, or feeling a total loss of energy	• Feeling a sense of loss
	• Feeling hungry and eating more than usual	• Strong cravings for meth • Hard to concentrate • Stomach upset, still eating more • Sometimes paranoia and hallucinations (less common)

## What that first month might be like.

### BEGINNING TO FEEL A LOT BETTER

	The 3 <sup>rd</sup> week	The 4 <sup>th</sup> week
		• Sleep begins to improve
	• Feeling healthier	• Feeling a sense of "I can do this!"
	• Anxiety and mood swings	• Less moody • Some nervousness
	• Some tiredness, but starting to get back some energy	• Energy improves
	• Cravings for meth	• Paranoia and hallucinations usually get better, but may sometimes last longer



# Treatment Options - Withdrawal

*Minimize stimuli*

*e.g. dim lights, quiet setting*

*Safe space*

*Lots of sleep*

*Lots of food and drinks*

## Agitation

Hyperresponsive, racing thoughts, emotional tension, motor/verbal hyperactivity, communication impairment, inability to remain calm

Diazepam 5mg PO q2-6h PRN

Lorazepam 0.5mg PO q2-6h PRN

## Psychosis

Hallucinations, delusions, delirium

Olanzapine 5mg PO q2h PRN

Risperidone 1mg PO q1h PRN

Quetiapine 12.5-25mg PO TID

How many eventually go on to get a Dx of schizophrenia or bipolar?

15-30% initially Dx with amphetamine-induced psychosis

20% initially Dx with cocaine-induced psychosis

# Treatment Options – Long-term

All off-label

All limited evidence

\*evidence emphasizes cocaine

\*a focus on meth is finding more evidence for psychostimulants (dexamphetamine and methylphenidate), naltrexone, and topiramate

MEDICATION	DOSING AND TITRATION	CONSIDERATIONS
Bupropion	150mg PO once daily x3 days, then 150mg PO twice daily <i>or</i> XR 150mg PO once daily, titrate over 3 days to 450mg PO once daily	Useful for concurrent ADHD Useful for desired smoking cessation Useful with symptoms of low energy, low mood
Naltrexone	25mg PO hs x 4 days, then 50mg PO once daily Increase by 25–50mg weekly as needed Max 150mg PO once daily	Useful for concurrent stimulant/alcohol use Cannot be used with opioid or opioid agonist treatment on board
Mirtazapine	15–30mg hs Can increase to 45mg hs	Useful for sleep assistance and low mood
Disulfiram	125mg PO once daily Can increase to 250mg PO once daily	Complete abstinence from alcohol required Compounding required Complete labs before starting, hepatic risk
Topiramate	25–50mg PO qhs, then increase by 25–50mg weekly as needed, dividing doses BID, to a max 300mg/day	Useful for concurrent stimulant/alcohol use Pregnancy category D

+contingency management

+psychosocial supports e.g. CBT



# Sources

## **BCCSU Practice Update 2022**

[https://www.bccsu.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Stimulant-Use-Disorder-Practice-Update\\_June2022.pdf](https://www.bccsu.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Stimulant-Use-Disorder-Practice-Update_June2022.pdf)

## **META:PHI Withdrawal Toolkit**

[https://www.metaphi.ca/wp-content/uploads/WMS\\_2.3\\_Stimulants.pdf](https://www.metaphi.ca/wp-content/uploads/WMS_2.3_Stimulants.pdf)

## **RxFiles Crystal Meth Patient Booklet**

<https://www.rxfiles.ca/rxfiles/uploads/documents/crystalmeth-patient-booklet.pdf>

# Q&A with Angela

## What is there to like?

- I can't speak for everyone, but what I liked was the fact that I was able to stay awake for days and get things done. Once I started injecting it, I felt like I was so powerful. Like nothing could hurt me and that I could do anything I wanted. The rush from injecting it is indescribable. The rush and feeling of power that surged through my body was insane. I felt like I could do anything I could imagine. Good or bad.

## How do you use?

- I'm really unsure of the costs now that I have been out of those circles for so long. When I quit dealing in 2020, an ounce of meth was about \$500. People would pay \$10 a point. It comes in what looks like pieces or shards of broken glass. To smoke it, you put a few small shards in your pipe/bubble. You heat the bubble from the bottom, using the tip of the flame from a lighter and you roll the pipe back and forth between your thumb and forefinger until the shard is melted and you can see vapor building up inside. You then lightly inhale the vapor and blow it out. To inject it, You smash up the shards and pack the powder into the top of the needle until you have the desired amount for your shot. I personally did 3 points in a shot. A 30 shot. Then you draw up your desired amount of water into the needle and you shake it until the meth has dissolved.

## Why stop?

- I stopped using it because I was tired of living that way. I lost even more than I did before, in the first 7 years of my addiction. This time was worse though. I was always fighting with someone, because of the aggression and violent tendencies from using meth for so long. My teeth were rotting out of my head, I hated myself and everyone around me. I hated myself for the things I did to people when I was high and on a rampage. Eventually, I just wanted to give up. Give up on myself, give up on my life, just give up on everything. I was overly paranoid, thinking people were out to get me. I would see shadows that aren't there and hear voices that aren't there. I felt like I was slowly going crazy.

## What helped you stop?

- The care I received was nothing more than amazing!! My doctor and his team were exemplary in making sure I was totally taken care of. The social worker in the clinic helped me get in touch with social services, who in turn got me a bed in the shelter at the YWCA and on assistance so I had an income. Dr. Wong and his staff have been my cheering section for almost 3 years. Other than my children and my grandson, I think that they are some of my biggest supporters through my journey. The ongoing support even now is amazing and I feel very lucky to have been able to work with them all on my journey.

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