Methamphetamine Abuse

By Karen Kuehn Howell, Ph.D.

Recent evidence from the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) indicates that abuse of methamphetamine and ecstasy, particularly by young adults, continues to be a growing source of concern in the United States and Eastern Europe. So-called “club drugs” such as MDMA (Ecstasy), GHB, Rohypnol, ketamine, methamphetamine, and LSD are currently gaining in popularity. According to Dr. Alan Leshner, Director, National Institute on Drug Abuse, because such drugs as MDMA and Rohypnol are colorless, tasteless, and odorless, they are easily slipped into drinks and have therefore been associated with sexual assaults. Hence, they are sometimes referred to as “date rape drugs.”

At present, research indicates that methamphetamine works on the same brain mechanisms as alcohol and can dangerously boost the effects of both substances. Methamphetamine is a toxic, addictive stimulant that affects many areas of the central nervous system. Methamphetamine use is associated with serious health consequences, including memory loss, aggression, violence, psychotic behavior, and potential cardiac and neurologic damage. MDMA, or Ecstasy, can produce both stimulant and psychedelic effects. It can be extremely dangerous in high doses, resulting in cardiac arrest, strokes, and seizures. Chronic use of ecstasy, according to NIDA’s International Visiting Scientists and Technical Exchange Program, appears to produce long-lasting, perhaps permanent damage to the neurons that release serotonin. The behavioral and cognitive consequences of ecstasy on this important neurotransmitter are still under investigation.
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