



**Meth mouth is difficult to distinguish from a simple case of poor oral hygiene. Dentists are advised to look for unaccounted for and accelerated decay in teenagers and young adults, and malnourished appearance in heavy users, because methamphetamine acts as an appetite suppressant.**

## **Meth Mouth – A Brief Overview**

Methamphetamine is a cheap, easy-to-make illicit drug. It's known by several street names: Meth, Speed, Ice, Chalk, Crank, Fire, Glass, and Crystal. It is highly addictive and its use is on the rise in the U.S. even though it produces devastating effects on users' health.

“Meth mouth” is an informal name for advanced tooth decay attributed to heavy methamphetamine use. According to the American Dental Association, meth mouth is probably caused by a combination of drug-induced psychological and physiological changes resulting in xerostomia (dry mouth), extended periods of poor oral hygiene, frequent consumption of high-calorie, carbonated beverages, and tooth grinding and clenching.

### **Characteristics of Meth Mouth:**

**Dry Mouth** - Saliva acts as a buffer against acidic substances in the mouth, neutralizing it and protecting teeth against acidic foods like lemons, acid from the stomach and other digestive organs, or acidic plaque. The average person produces around one liter of saliva a day. If saliva production is reduced, oral bacteria levels can increase ten times over normal levels.

Meth dries out the salivary glands. Without saliva, the acidic substances can eat away at the minerals in tooth enamel, causing holes or weak spots that turn into cavities. Other medications dry the mouth but Meth is especially bad.

**Tooth Decay** - Meth users are notorious for trying to treat cottonmouth (dry mouth) with lots of sugary soda. The bacteria that feed on the sugars in the mouth secrete acid, which leads to more tooth decay. Also, Meth users aren't likely to floss, brush and rinse when high on the drug.

A typical cavity starts in between two teeth. It eventually invades the tooth and destroys it from the inside out. Crank decay invariably starts at the gum line - it eventually spreads around the entire tooth, eating swaths of enamel in its wake.

**Cracked Teeth** - Because the drug can make them feel anxious or nervous, causing them to clench or grind their teeth, regular Meth users may develop cracks in their teeth.

**Gum Disease** - Teeth and gums need blood to stay healthy. Meth causes the vessels that supply blood to oral tissues to shrink up. Reduced blood supply causes tissues to break down. With repeated shrinking, the blood vessels don't recover and tissues die.