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Ice Bugs: Don't Scratch That Phantom Itch!

Written by: [American Addiction Centers Editorial Staff](#) Updated Jan 19, 2023

Methamphetamine is an extremely addictive stimulant that causes irreversible harm to the body. Manufactured from a toxic concoction of chemicals, it damages blood vessels in the brain, destroys teeth and causes severe impairment in memory, judgment and motor coordination. And the consequences don't stop there.

Using [meth](#) comes with a few more not-so-awesome side effects: severe paranoia and delusions. And as a result of that intoxicated mental backlash, users often develop what's known as "ice bugs" or meth sores – that's what we're going to talk about in this blog post.

A Literal Hot Mess

Meth use increases body temperature and blood flow to the skin, which results in sweating. Perspiration contains an enzyme that also increases the blood flow to the skin. As the sweat evaporates, the protective sebaceous oil which coats the skin is removed. The combined effects of dehydration, sweating and removal of the sebaceous oil create a sensation similar to a bug crawling on or under the skin, known as formication.

Many meth users feel this crawling sensation and start to obsessively pick, scrape and dig at their skin to get rid of the "bugs." Some even resort to using scissors, knives and blades creating horrible sores and open wounds that the body has trouble healing.

Not only do these open sores look frightening, they also increase the risk of bacterial infections and the possibility of contracting other diseases like hepatitis or HIV. If a sore becomes infected, the site will become inflamed, swollen, sore and pus-filled, and require antibacterial drugs. Left untreated, however, these sores can lead to abscesses, ulcers and septicemia.

[Begin Assessment](#)

Disclaimer: Only a medical or clinical professional may diagnose a substance use disorder. This self-assessment is not a diagnostic tool and should not be used as such. The assessment may serve as an indicator of a potential addiction but should not replace a diagnosis from a professional treatment provider.

Just Make It Stop!

The good news is, these hallucinations and delusions of “ice bugs” end after they’ve stopped using the drug, or if they’ve been on a drug binge, finally gotten some sleep. However, meth is addictive and has powerful withdrawal symptoms.

Once it wears off, which takes anywhere from a couple of hours to a couple of days, the cravings are more intense and drive the user to do whatever it takes to get more of the drug. This is why it’s so important to seek outside help. Only treatment provides a medically supervised detox and supportive care to minimize the discomfort experienced during the [withdrawal process](#).

Additional Reading: [The Damage Done – 6 Long-Term Reminders of Meth Abuse](#)

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