



Methamphetamine Addiction

How Meth Rewires the Brain's Reward System and Leads to Compulsive Use

What is Methamphetamine Addiction?

Methamphetamine addiction is a chronic brain disorder driven by the drug's massive release of dopamine, which overwhelms the brain's reward system and rapidly creates compulsive use. The drug directly damages the dopamine system itself, causing the brain to lose its capacity to experience pleasure or motivation. Sustained recovery without extended treatment is extremely difficult.

What Does It Look Like?

- **Days Without Sleep Followed by Collapse**
They stay awake for two, three, or more days at a time, then crash into extended, unresponsive sleep.
- **Paranoia That Reshapes Every Relationship**
They become convinced people are watching, following, or conspiring against them.
- **Dramatic Physical Deterioration**
Severe weight loss, skin sores from compulsive picking, and dental decay become noticeable.
- **Bursts of Frantic Activity**
Disassembling, organizing, or cleaning compulsively, often without completing anything meaningful.

Why Does Methamphetamine Addiction Become Chronic?

When someone has been through treatment and continues to use methamphetamine, the pattern is reflective of how the substance is deeply entwined with brain chemistry and established behavioral patterns.

- 1) Damage to the Dopamine System**
Depleted and damaged dopamine receptors reduce the ability of the brain to regulate mood or motivation.
- 2) Time Needed for Neurological Recovery**
Dopamine function can take months of sustained abstinence to partially restore, far longer than a standard treatment program.
- 3) Untreated Psychosis, Depression, and Trauma**
Co-occurring mental health conditions can remain active long after the substance is removed, leading to relapse.

Prevalence:

2.6 Million annual users in the U.S.¹

Co-Occurrence:

57.7% of adults who used methamphetamine reported a co-occurring mental illness²

Relapse Risk:

61% of individuals relapse within one year of completing treatment³

Sources: ¹ SAMHSA, *2023 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (2024)*. ² Jones et al., *CDC MMWR (2020)*: based on 2015-2018 NSDUH data. ³ Brecht & Herbeck, *Drug and Alcohol Dependence (2014)*.

Long-Term Treatment for Methamphetamine Addiction

Methamphetamine damages the brain's dopamine system in ways that take months of sustained abstinence to even partially reverse. A short-term program can address acute stabilization, but it cannot **restore neurological function** or treat the psychosis, depression, and trauma that drive continued use. Families watch their loved one leave short-term programs still unable to think clearly or regulate emotions, and relapse follows within weeks.

Our long-term, progress-based model **gives the brain the extended time it needs to heal** while building the coping skills, accountability, and behavioral patterns that replace methamphetamine's role. Clients advance through treatment as they demonstrate real change.



“Methamphetamine damages the brain's ability to feel anything good without the drug. That's what makes the first few months of recovery so difficult, and it's where short-term programs fail by sending people home before the brain has healed.”

 **Brook McKenzie, LCDC**
CEO, Burning Tree Ranch



Dual Diagnosis Treatment for Methamphetamine Addiction

When methamphetamine addiction is treated in isolation, the conditions that sustained the use remain active. Depression, psychosis, PTSD, and other **mental health disorders co-occur with methamphetamine use at a high rate**, and methamphetamine itself can produce psychiatric symptoms that persist for months after the last use.

At Burning Tree Ranch, we create an individualized treatment plan to **address methamphetamine dependence alongside co-occurring conditions** through evidence-based therapies and trauma-informed care, building toward lasting, sustainable sobriety.

Dual Diagnosis Defined:

The presence of **both a substance use disorder and a mental health condition** occurring together. Effective treatment for dual-diagnosis addictions must address both aspects simultaneously.



Have Other Treatment Programs Missed the Deeper Issues?

Burning Tree Ranch is the Nation's only authentic long-term treatment program for chronic relapse. Call us at (866) 287-2877 or visit us online at www.BurningTree.com.

Disclaimer: Burning Tree Ranch aims to enhance the quality of life for individuals battling substance use and mental health disorders through well-researched and professionally reviewed content. Our publications focus on the nature of behavioral health conditions, available treatments, and their outcomes. Reviewed by licensed experts, our material is informative but not a replacement for professional advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always seek the guidance of a licensed health provider for any medical or clinical concerns.