



A Guide to
Staying Off
Crystal
For a Day or Longer

Including Harm Reduction Strategies



**Practical tips from gay
and bisexual men**



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Introduction

This booklet is a practical guide for gay, bi, trans guys that are looking to change their use of crystal meth. This resource provides strategies and resources for guys that are looking to change or reduce the impacts of their crystal meth use, and also help guys that are looking to stop using all together.

What is Crystal?

It's the name we give to a drug called crystal methamphetamine. Common names for crystal are "tina", crystal meth, and meth. Other street terms for crystal include speed, ice, glass and crank. Crystal belongs to a family of drugs called amphetamines - powerful stimulants that speed up the body's central nervous system.

Crystal is not legally available in Canada.

This booklet will also be useful for anyone trying to quit speed, crack and/or cocaine as they share similarities with meth.



WHAT IS CRYSTAL MADE OF?

The chemicals and processes used to produce tina vary. Here's a partial list of some things often used to make it:

- » pseudoephedrine or ephedrine (active ingredient in some cold and cough medicines)
- » red phosphorous (striking pad of a matchbook)
- » acetone (nail polish remover)
- » toluene (brake cleaner)
- » lithium (camera batteries)
- » anhydrous ammonia (farm fertilizer)
- » muriatic acid (swimming pool cleaner)
- » methanol (gasoline additive)
- » naphtha (camp stove fuel)
- » Drano™ and Red Devil Lye™ (drain cleaners)
- » iodine (the stuff you put on a cut)
- » denatured alcohol



Myths about crystal and sex

It is commonly believed that crystal meth liberated deep-down, otherwise repressed sexual desires and fantasies. The most recent psychological studies show that this is a misunderstanding of how crystal meth works on the brain and how it affects our sex lives.

Crystal meth shuts down the higher-functioning, evolutionary-serving parts of the brain that regulate self-care and survival. At the same time, it increases our sex drive. It's not that we're having sex we'd normally be too ashamed to have. It's that we're horny from the crystal meth while our ability to perceive and assess potential risks is impaired.

(Kurtz, S.P. (2005) Post-Circuit Blues: Motivations and consequences of Crystal Meth Use among Gay Men in Miami. *AIDS and Behaviour*, V9, 1, 63-72.)

Considering staying off crystal?

Considering staying off crystal can be a challenge, and deciding to quit crystal is a huge step – congratulations! If the next steps feel really hard or scary, that's normal. Keep reading!

This booklet contains thoughts and advice from many gay and bisexual men who have walked this same path before or are still walking it. We don't claim to be role models for change. We've made some mistakes, and we don't have all the answers. But we do want to offer hope and the belief that you can make it!

The most important thing to remember is that you are not alone. There's a whole community of men who understand what you're going through. Help and support are out there! We hope you find both in this booklet.

RECOVERY FEARS



- I'll be boring.
- I'll lose my friends if I tell them about my use.
- I'll gain weight.
- I'll never have sex again.
- I don't think I can make it.

REALITY CHECK



- I'll be real.
- If I haven't lost them yet, my friends already know.
- I didn't look that pretty strung out.
- I'll never have cold, degrading sex again.
- Neither did those of us in recovery now.

What to expect

When you cut back on your use or stop using crystal, you will likely go through very distinct stages.

Almost everyone who quits crystal goes through them. Each stage is described on the following pages. You'll see that each stage has its own challenges, rewards, and advice for handling both.

You may find it helpful to mark these stages on a calendar (yes, the time frames can be that predictable). That way you can watch your progress and prepare for what lies ahead.

Mental Health

It's well documented that mental and emotional difficulties are at the root of many dependencies. We often think that drugs create mental or emotional problems, and they do, but for most people addiction comes as a result of a mental health problem. Drug use can be a form of self-medication for depression and anxiety, bi-polar, attention deficit and hyperactivity disorders, as well as histories of sexual abuse and trauma.



When considering quitting crystal meth, it's important that we find a good counsellor and look at the underlying reasons that we turned to crystal meth in the first place. There are resources listed at the back of this booklet.

(Swendsen et al., 2010. Mental disorders as risk factors for substance use, abuse and dependence: results from the 10-year follow-up of the National Comorbidity Survey. The Authors: Journal Compilation. Society for the Study of Addiction)

What about sex after crystal?

We can have great sex after crystal even if we are worried that sex will never be the same. Be glad that it won't! Sex may have been hot and wild at first, but it probably became mechanical, disconnected, painful, dehydrated and impotent. Most guys are happy to leave that part behind.

How to reclaim your sex life without crystal

AT FIRST:

- » Chat rooms, websites, and bathhouses can be a slippery slope. If you're going there, why are you (honestly)? Is it for sex, or are you really looking for drugs?
- » Think twice before dating or fucking guys you meet in early recovery. Emotions can be raw, volatile, and skewed.

- » Find less risky ways to take care of your sexual urges. Play it safe.
- » Trust that you will have sex again. Most men do. Are you throwing a pity party about sex as an excuse to get high?

BEFORE SEX STARTS AGAIN:

- » Get to know your sexual self again. Maybe you changed or got lost in crystal. What turns you on now? What satisfied you before?
- » Rethink your values about sex. What do you really want from relationships? Sex?
- » Trust your gut on when it feels okay to start having sex again. If you can't even jerk off without thinking about drugs, you might not be ready.
- » Get tested for HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs), even if you fear the results or don't feel or see any symptoms.
- » What about safer sex? How will you talk about HIV status or condoms? How will you limit risks around HIV and other STIs?

“Don't compare your recovery with anyone else's. Focus on who you are now, who you were then, and who you still want to become.”

WHEN SEX DOES HAPPEN:

The first few times can feel awkward and embarrassing. You might feel self-conscious about your looks or worry about how your body will function. Emotional connection or actually knowing someone before sex can help ease fear and anxiety.

Be prepared for how much you will actually feel physically and emotionally. Pleasure, pain, confusion, thrill, love – anything can happen without crystal to numb it.

Talk about how you feel with your partner. Set limits on what feels safe for you. It's okay to stop if you feel freaked out. It's also okay to dive in if it feels good!



GOOD THINGS ABOUT SEX WITHOUT CRYSTAL

- » A dick that works!
- » Actually feeling and experiencing it.
- » Not feeling shame about what you're doing.
- » A sense of respect for yourself and the guy you're with.

What to expect:

→ **0 - 2 weeks**

We feel crazy as our body and brain re-learn how to work without meth.

WHAT'S TOUGH:

- Need to eat and sleep a lot. Hard to set a pattern.
- Cravings can be frequent and hard to manage.
- Raw, swinging emotions: fear, anger, depression, hopelessness.
- May still hear voices.
- No energy or motivation. Hard to follow through on anything.
- Grieving, sense of loss.

WHAT'S GOOD:

- The repair begins!
- Slowly getting in touch with reality.

ADVICE:

- Sleep and eat as much healthy food as you want.
- Keep your goals small.
- Lay low and ride it out.
- It will get better!

You have a lot of strengths to draw upon from your addiction. Whatever helped you survive crystal can help you succeed in recovery too.

What to expect:

→ **1 month**

Handling day-to-day life again.

WHAT'S TOUGH:

- Cravings can still be intense.
- Changes in how body looks and feels.
- Weight gain.
- Frustration at how long it can take to get services or treatment.
- Sexual urges resurface.

WHAT'S GOOD:

- Cravings do ease up.
- Clarity!
- Wow, you look so much better!
- Feeling healthier.
- Getting support where you don't expect it.

ADVICE:

- Keep busy. Build a routine.
- Tell others that you have stopped using. They may not judge you as badly as you judge yourself.
- Limit situations that could make you feel really good or really bad.
- Let go of feeling fat. Buy new pants and move on.
- Look at what you have achieved so far.
- Write down some goals on paper!

Telling others about your addiction or recovery is like coming out of the closet again. It's hard to do, but it lifts the burden.

What to expect:

→ **1-3 months**

Cleaning up the damage and feeling “normal” again.

WHAT’S TOUGH:

- Sexual urges.
- Cravings can still be hard to manage.
- Shame, sense of personal failure.
- Too much or too little to do.
- Loneliness.

WHAT’S GOOD:

- Briefer and less intense cravings. More confidence to handle them.
- Jobs, housing, money coming together.
- Seeing more success. I can do this.
- Trust in self and others replace paranoia.
- Re-connecting with friends, family.
- Get connected to support groups.

ADVICE:

- It’s easy to get over-ambitious. Pace yourself
- Connect with other people even if you don’t want to.
- Be clear about what you need from people and what you can give. It’s okay to have really firm rules at first.
- Talk about your feelings.
- Sex can wait if it triggers you.
- Don’t put too much pressure on yourself, appreciate how far you’ve come.

When you feel triggered, talk about it.

What to expect:

→ **3 months**

Thrill of recovery hits “The Wall”.

WHAT’S TOUGH:

- Recovery and life get boring!
- New joys slow down.
- Depression, feeling alone.
- Realizing what you lost or did to your loved ones.
- Feeling like nothing has changed in your life.
- Unexpected triggers (running into dealer, finding an old baggy, etc.)

WHAT’S GOOD:

- Feeling confident.
- Self-forgiveness.
- The feeling and comfort of meaningful, supportive relationships.

DANGER OF RELAPSE MAY PEAK HERE!

- Two big pitfalls: feeling over-confident or not appreciating your progress.
- If you feel “it’s not working for me,” hang in there. It’s working.
- The key is to ramp up your recovery, physical and social activities.
- Ask about medication for depression or anxiety if you need to.

If you lose faith, think about your worst day on crystal.

What to expect:

→ **4-6 months**

A new you starts to take hold.

WHAT'S TOUGH:

- Feeling emotions, often in big swings.
- Confusion about what's next in life and relationships.
- Boredom.
- Seeing potential payoffs but feeling depressed if they seem far away.

WHAT'S GOOD:

- Feeling less shame, more self-forgiveness.
- Connecting more, taking more proactive steps.
- Feeling more productive.
- Dealing with your real issues.

ADVICE:

- Change up your recovery routine with new meetings or groups.
- Consider the role of other drugs, alcohol, or cigarettes in your life.
- Get into an exercise routine.
- Take a fresh look at your triggers — they may be different now.
- Start exploring the underlying reasons you were using crystal.

Celebrate your successes with something other than using. Getting high is the wrong reward!

What to expect:

→ **6-12 months**

Life gets into a healthy rhythm.

WHAT'S TOUGH:

- Feeling over-confident.
- Lose sight of your wellness plan because you feel good or no longer remember the bad.
- Resentment that others don't have the same challenges as you.
- Disappointment that you don't have everything you thought you would by now.
- What worked before might not work anymore.

WHAT'S GOOD:

- Handling challenges with honesty and integrity and liking what you find.
- Making plans for the future and follow through.
- Getting to know more about yourself and liking what you discover.
- Really satisfying relationships.
- Important rewards (supports, housing, work).
- Discovering new interests.

ADVICE:

- Balance your life with more non-recovery activities and hobbies.
- Vary your recovery routine.
- Stay tuned in to your feelings and express them.
- Take care of health issues.

When relapse happens

Everyone said, “Relapse is normal.” So we used it as an excuse to relapse! Relapse may be common, but it’s not a requirement.

A “slip” is an unplanned use of crystal after a period of not using, quickly followed by a return to our goal of abstinence; or managed use for those people with a goal of moderation. Slips can have unpleasant impacts on us, but are often less impactful than a full relapse or return to previous use patterns. A relapse is a return to the way we used to use, before we started to make changes. Relapses tend to last longer than slips.

As soon as we stop the relapse, we enter this void. We instantly shut out the using community, but we’re often too embarrassed to reconnect with our recovery friends. So there’s frustration and loneliness. But we have to get honest with what happened ASAP. As soon as we let our circle know we’ve relapsed, we’ll come out of the void. Don’t isolate. Get back to the plan.

Relapse can really tear up our self-esteem. Because we had some clean time, we know what’s positive and worthwhile on the other side. That sometimes helps pull us out. But other times we feel like a fuck-up because we had that good stuff and then blew it. We have to fight that hopelessness and stop beating ourselves up.



RELAPSE RED FLAGS

Are you...

Thinking more about how, when, where, and with whom you might get high again?

Feeling really, really bored?

Overdoing...anything? Too much work, exercise, time spent online, etc.?

Making excuses to skip groups or meetings?

Lying to yourself or others?
Being secretive?

Using other drugs or drinking more?

Believing your problem is completely fixed?

Isolating?

Obsessing about weight or quick ways to lose it?

Obsessing about sex or quick ways to get it?

If you think you're in trouble, look on pages 12-17 for some great advice!

When both of you quit

ADVICE FOR COUPLES:

You can't get clean for the other person. You have to do recovery because you want it. Using the other person as a motivator often builds resentment.

Many couples worry, "Will we still like each other?" Don't let the fear of change keep you from moving forward. If you take the risk of losing each other, you may actually find new reasons you want to stay together.

Go to separate treatment programs or counsellors. You each need your own time and space. Find a different counsellor for any therapy you do as a couple.

Make an agreement to not talk about the bad things you did to each other while high. You can't undo them. You are different people now.

Tough love. Be willing to say to your partner, "If you relapse, I will have to step away from you." You have to be able to disconnect.

Don't compare recoveries. It's not a competition.



TIPS FOR REBUILDING TRUST:

Actions become extremely important. Follow through on what you say. If you don't think you can do something, don't say you can. Be honest.

Communicate openly even if it feels hard to do.

When feelings of mistrust creep in, deal with them right away. Don't let them fester.

Special advice for HIV-positive guys

If you already had HIV or you think you got HIV because of your use, the first step is to forgive yourself. You can't keep feeling guilty for exposing others to HIV. You can't keep blaming yourself for getting it.

Your body might take longer to get balanced again. You might feel more tired. That's frustrating when you're so ready for recovery but your body isn't. Watch how that adds to depression.

Make your health a number one priority. Don't dwell on the damage you caused to your body with crystal. You're taking care of yourself now. That's what matters.

Get a medical check-up as soon as you can. Be honest with your doctor about everything.

Connect with a case manager. Plug into services that can help.





WATCH FOR THESE RELAPSE TRIGGERS:

- » Many guys are surprised when even small changes in how their bodies feel can make them think of crystal.
- » Feeling discouraged if your health gets worse.
- » Feeling like “letting loose” if your health really improves.

Guys who inject

First, you are not worse off because you slammed crystal. We acknowledge that there is a lot of judgement about injection drug use. You don't have to feel more shame.

We may tend to isolate. Worlds become very small, and it can be hard to be out in public. In recovery you may struggle to make connections. Start slow — one person at a time.

Triggers are often more intense. If you injected, you may miss the “ritual” of slamming almost as much as the high. When you start to feel the “rush” firing through your body, do anything to stop the thoughts.

Guys who smoke

Similar to injecting, smoking crystal is accompanied by a ritual that can be as much a part of the addiction as the drug itself. Smoking crystal produces an intense high as well.

Remember to take it slowly. Reconnect with one person at a time and take things one day at a time.

Smoking any drug can irritate your lungs, which over time can lead to problems like asthma and emphysema. Smoking meth uses up larger quantities of the drug much faster than if snorting or swallowing. You also get high much quicker with a more intense high than through swallowing or snorting.

Before you hit the pipe, decide how much you're going to use and stick to that amount. You can also decrease the frequency of hitting the pipe after your first hit.

Harm Reduction



In an effort to make this booklet useful to people across the continuum of use, we are including harm reduction strategies for guys that may still be actively using crystal meth.

Harm reduction is a philosophy and a set of strategies intended to reduce the harm associated with drugs and drug use for the user and the community. Harm reduction is about providing judgement-free information to people, while allowing them to make educated choices about their drug use. We are not promoting the use of crystal meth, but we are acknowledging that gay and bi guys use crystal, and we want to keep them safe.

GUYS WHO ARE ABOUT TO USE



Set limits for yourself before you use. How much will you use? How long will you stay up? Where will you go when it's time to crash?

Plan your spending. Think about avoiding impulse spending. Decide before you go out how much you're willing to spend and take only that amount of cash. Try leaving your debit and credit cards at home.

Be a party planner! Plan your party time to include crash time. How long is your rebound? If you're travelling to play, do you have your own personal items like a tooth brush/razor? (Sharing these items is a risk for Hep C transmission)

If you can, party with people you trust. Make sure there's someone you can talk to honestly about your drug use and the problems you might encounter along the way. This doesn't

have to be someone who uses, just someone who will listen to and hear you.

Keep some extra cash, say a folded up \$10 bill, in your sock or shoe or in that extra little pocket on the right side of most jeans. This money could be cab fare or something else you need when there's no ATM in sight.

If you're poz and partying think about how long you tend to go on a run for. Will you need your meds with you? How many days worth?

(Modified from www.Tweaker.org)

GUYS WHO ARE USING RIGHT NOW

←
Drink lots of water when you're using. Crystal meth use is dehydrating and this can lead to feeling bad and all sorts of health problems.

If you're snorting crystal meth, have your own straw or bumper. After you use, try a squirt of saline spray or a snort of warm water up each nostril. This can help keep nasal passages clean and clear. It also makes it a little easier on delicate tissues.

If you're considering slamming (injecting), find out how to do it correctly – local harm reduction rooms or even videos on youtube can teach you how to inject so you can reduce likelihood of health problems. Someone you know might know the correct way, or they might just be replicating a harmful practice as they learned it.

If you're slamming (injecting), use alcohol swabs, fresh cotton and your own brand new needle each time you use. Sharing needles can spread HIV and Hepatitis C. Be sure to clean a

spot before you hit so that you avoid abscesses and other infections.

Sugar may be tempting but if you've got an appetite while using try some protein and complex carbs.

Tuna fish is another great food. It's loaded with protein, and other stuff to restore your energy.

Tell your regular using friends what your limits are, preferably before you get high. Stay firm to your goal, even if they make jokes or try to "tempt" you otherwise.

Establish a "purchase limit" with your dealer. Yes, some dealers will do this to keep you a stable customer!

(Modified from www.Tweaker.org)

SAFER SEX FOR GUYS WHO ARE USING

→
If there's more than one guy in your scene and you want to play safely, start with a fresh condom each time you change partners.

If you're going to have anal sex, try a silicone-based lube. Silicone-based lube lasts longer, and it's perfectly compatible with condoms.

If you're a bottom and you don't like it raw, check to see if your top has a condom on. Ask to see it or just reach out (or over, down, back or across depending on position) and feel it for yourself.

Are you using a condom for a long, long time? Check to see if it's still there and intact. Condoms should be changed regularly, depending on the type of play.

Some guys prefer the Reality condom™ (aka: insertive condom) to regular condoms. The Reality condom™ is the one that the bottom wears. It's worth a try and you may find that it works for you.

If you're having condomless sex with partners with mixed or unknown status and you're poz – remember to take your meds as prescribed. We know that staying undetectable doesn't mean 'no risk' but it definitely helps reduce the likelihood of transmitting HIV more than not.

PNP doesn't necessarily mean bare backing. There are plenty of guys who use crystal meth and have safer sex. You could be one of them!

Get Tested! Whether you have one regular partner, a number of partners, or both – getting tested for HIV and STIs is a really great way to manage your sexual health and keep you (and your teammates) in the game! All STIs are treatable and most are curable. Everyone has a right to sexual health.

(Modified from www.Tweaker.org)

GUYS WHO ARE TRYING TO CUT DOWN



It can take a long time after your last use for the brain chemistry and body systems to get back to normal. Cutting back the frequency of your use may be the way to go.

Cutting down frequency can mean lengthening the time between uses – from bump to bump or run to run; the more time you take off from crystal use the better for your body and mind.

Maybe you can extend the time between hits? Wait 20 minutes this time then 30 minutes the next time and so on. Maybe you'll find you don't actually want or need that next hit.

How long does what you buy usually last? Are you a gram a weekend kind of guy? Next time buy half your usual amount and make it last for the same period of time.

Record how much you use, when and where you use it, and how much you spend on it. Try this for a week or so. You may be surprised.

Ask your friends who don't use, to do stuff with you on days you usually use. Periodically, but regularly, breaking the pattern may lead to less frequent use.

Delete and block those dealer and hook-up numbers from your cell phone. If you can't call them maybe they won't call you.

Change your on-line profile to indicate 'No PNP'. Consider taking a break from the online scene. Check out a Crystal Meth Anonymous (CMA) meeting.

Plan crystal-free weekends. Schedule activities ahead of time so you don't get bored. Make commitments with other people so you are less likely to change your mind and get high.

Have a plan for your money. Pocket money or handy cash can really be a challenge. Spend your money on other things as soon as you get paid or put it in the bank.

(Modified from www.Tweaker.org)



Toronto Resources

These are just some of the many resources available:

Online harm reduction

www.himynameistina.com

AIDS Committee of Toronto (ACT)

Free, confidential and anonymous counselling services for individuals and couples. Counsellors are available on call or by appointment. Call to confirm or check online.

416-340-2437

ask@actoronto.org

www.actoronto.org/counselling

Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH):

Rainbow Services

Rainbow Services provides comprehensive counselling for LGBTTTIQ individuals, couples, and family members, and can be one-on-one, group, or a combination; it can be short-term or long-term.

416-535-8501 or 1-800-463-2338 ext. 4647

www.camh.net

Anonymous fellowships

Sometimes the only way to go is abstinence. It might not be crystal meth-specific, but lots of guys who use crystal find fellowships useful, as the concepts are about addiction in general. Also, many guys who are addicted to crystal are addicted to other drugs, or their crystal use is triggered by other drugs.

Crystal Meth Anonymous

www.crystalmeth.org

torontocma@yahoo.ca

Alcoholics Anonymous

www.aatoronto.org

Narcotics Anonymous

www.torontona.org

Cocaine Anonymous

www.ca-on.org

Positive Routes to Recovery

HIV-positive recovery group, 1st and 3rd Tuesday of every month at the 519 Church Street Community Centre from 6-8pm.

[www.the519.org/programsservices/groups#Peer Support](http://www.the519.org/programsservices/groups#Peer%20Support)

RECREATIONAL AND HEALTHY LIFESTYLE SUPPORTS

Many guys find it helpful to change their routines and seek support outside of professional support systems. Recreational activities can be extremely useful in the recovery process.

Out and Out (LGBT Social and Recreational Club)

www.outandout.on.ca

EMERGENCY, ADDICTION, MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS AND IMMEDIATE CARE (24/7)

Toronto Withdrawal Management Services

1-866-366-9513

Hospital emergency rooms

CAMH's Centralized Assessment, Triage and Support (CATS)

416-979-4747

Gerstein Crisis Centre

Mental Health Crisis Services

416-929-5200

HARM REDUCTION AND COUNSELING (WALK-IN BASIS DURING OFFICE HOURS)

Towel Talk Bathhouse Counselling

416-340-8484 ext. 289

www.atoronto.org/toweltalk

Hassle Free Clinic

416-922-0603

www.hasslefreeclinic.org

Making the Links

Counselling and referrals

416-922-3549 x124

www.hasslefreeclinic.org/links

South Riverdale Community Health Centre

Safer injection and inhalation kits

416-461-1925

www.srchc.ca

The Works

Safer injection and inhalation supplies and support

416-392-0520

www.toronto.ca/health/sexualhealth/sh_the_works.htm

Black Coalition for AIDS Prevention (Black CAP)

Monthly harm reduction drop-in

416-977-9955 ext. 254

www.blackcap.ca

Queen West CHC

Counselling and harm reduction supplies

416-703-8480

www.ctchc.com/site_qw

SPUNK! Group (ACT)

6-week harm reduction based group for GBT guys interested in talking about their drug use and sex lives.

416-340-8484 ext. 235

spunk@actoronto.org

www.actoronto.org/spunk

PHONE INFO

AIDS and Sexual Health Info Line

416-392-2437 or 1-800-668-2437

The Mainline

Harm Reduction, IDU, Needle Exchange

1-800-686-7544

Telehealth Ontario

1-866-797-0000 / TTY: 1-866-797-0007

Staying Off Crystal is a project of the **AIDS Committee of Toronto (ACT)** based on the original document created by **Public Health, Seattle King County**.

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For more information:



act

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