

Chief Leanne Joe,

I appreciate your request for further information on Gina's medical conditions. Crystal Meth is very addictive and the relapse rate is alarmingly high.

Crystal Meth, is a stimulant. It is similar in structure to adrenaline. It can be smoked by vaporizing the crystal or injected or can be swallowed or snorted. It has similar dependence properties to cocaine. Use of Crystal meth can lead to brain damage.

The following information was taken from the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Commission.* I think you should find it quite useful in dealing with Gina's condition.

*Methamphetamine: what to expect when someone quits

Methamphetamine is also called "meth," "crystal," "ice," "speed," "jib" and "crank." Methamphetamine is a drug that stimulates the central nervous system. When people use methamphetamine, they feel alert and energetic and often have no interest in food or sleep. Users may experience any or all of the following negative effects:

- rapid and unhealthy weight loss (under no circumstances should this drug be considered as an aid to weight loss)
- sores on the skin, or itchy skin that can lead to scratching and sores and infection
- confusion, irrational anger, paranoia and irritability
- damage to the inside of the nose from "railing" (snorting) the drug
- out of control rages (violent and aggressive behaviour referred to as "tweaking")
- problems with thinking, memory, concentration and movement
- brain damage - there is evidence that brain damage occurs in some users

In general, when people are withdrawing from methamphetamine they will experience the opposite of the effects of the drug. The severity of withdrawal depends on how long and how much they used. The following physical symptoms may last for about five days:

- extreme tiredness - they may sleep for most of two to four days

- disturbed sleep - after extended use of amphetamines normal sleep patterns do not return for many weeks
- dry mouth
- headaches
- anxiety, paranoia, hallucinations

The emotional withdrawal symptoms can last for weeks or months. These include:

- depression
- anxiety
- paranoia
- loss of motivation
- low energy
- extreme craving for the drug

What you can do

Watching others withdraw from drugs can be frightening and you may feel helpless. You can support them by:

- helping them get plenty of sleep
- ensuring they get plenty of fluids
- providing healthy food
- encouraging and affirming their move as wise and courageous in the long run
- acknowledging that withdrawal is difficult and sometimes painful
- reminding them that the brain and body need time to heal
- helping them learn to live again without the drug *

Young people going through withdrawal may experience depression and rage. Knowing Gina's predisposition to depression, she should be closely monitored at all times. She should also have frequent visits with her doctor. I would also recommend that you take some training in suicide prevention just to be on the safe side. Gina might benefit from a youth support group for teens with addictions and you may look for a similar support group for parents who's children are facing addictions. Please stop by for a visit and I can recommend a group in your area.

Barney Pallentrop
Addictions Counselor

* http://www.aadac.com/index_flash.htm