

CRYSTAL AND OUR MOOD

huh?

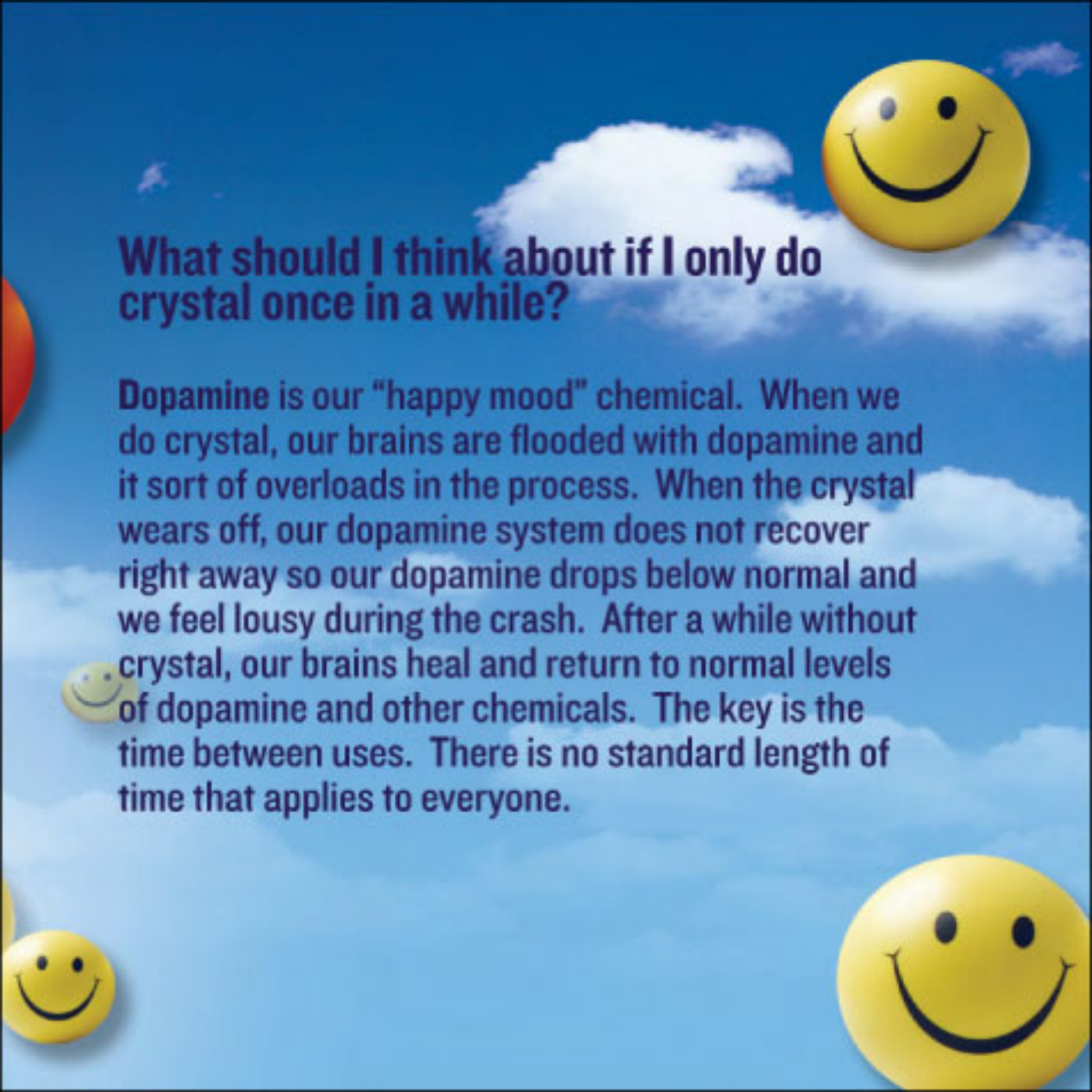


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What should I think about if I only do crystal once in a while?

Dopamine is our "happy mood" chemical. When we do crystal, our brains are flooded with dopamine and it sort of overloads in the process. When the crystal wears off, our dopamine system does not recover right away so our dopamine drops below normal and we feel lousy during the crash. After a while without crystal, our brains heal and return to normal levels of dopamine and other chemicals. The key is the time between uses. There is no standard length of time that applies to everyone.



And what about if I've been doing it for a long time?

Repeated highs and lows make our brains feel like saying, "Why am I wasting my time making these chemicals when another hit of speed will do it for me!?!". Our dopamine system doesn't get a chance to recover and dopamine drops below its normal level and stays there. This is why some of us end up not feeling happy, satisfied or enjoying what we used to enjoy. Research shows that consistent use of crystal causes damage to synapses, the nerve endings that regulate the release and processing of brain chemicals. Like we said before, there's no standard about how long it takes for our brains to heal. Some of it depends on how much crystal we did over how long a period of time. And the healing process varies from person to person.



Am I depressed because I do crystal?

So far you've read that crystal causes ups and downs of dopamine in your brain. Dopamine and the parts of the brain impacted by speed are essential to the experience of pleasure and reward. Since we have lots of dopamine when we're high and much less than normal when we're crashing, feeling "depressed" when coming down is kind of typical. It's a temporary form of depression. Over time, regular use makes for seriously depleted dopamine levels. This leads to a drug-induced depression that usually improves given enough time away from the drug. Some of us rebound quickly. Others of us take much longer and may consider medication to help ourselves along.

Am I anxious because I do crystal?

By anxiety we mean feelings of intense worry, stress and irritability. When we're anxious, some of us tremble, have heart palpitations, get headaches, or feel nauseated. Crystal depletes chemicals that help stabilize our mood. It increases norepinephrine, a chemical that creates the classic fight or flight response. A tipped balance of these chemicals brings on feelings of anxiety.

Using any drug on a regular basis brings a lot of drama into our lives. We feel anxious when we've got problems with relationships, at work, with money, housing or legal hassles. And seeing slow but steady changes in our appearance and physical health can make it all seem worse. Guess what? All of these are common tangible side effects of drug use.

What about paranoia? And psychosis?

The caricature of the tweaker who only sees the world from between the mini-blinds is based on someone we all know. It's also someone we may be or have been ourselves:

Paranoia, in a nutshell, is an irrational idea about and unwarranted suspicion of being exploited, harmed or plotted against. A big cause of paranoia is lack of sleep and its impact on our brain chemistry. While some of us have serious problems with paranoia every time we use, others never experience it. It does seem, though, that the chance of becoming paranoid increases the longer we mess with meth and the longer we stay awake without even a cat nap. And once we start getting paranoid, it tends to happen every time we do the drug.



Psychosis refers to a distinct episode of delusional thinking, hallucinations and disorganized thoughts or behavior. This can come on suddenly or can linger after we've stopped using.

And again, once we start getting psychotic on speed, it tends to happen every time we do the drug. There's not much difference between plain old psychosis and speed-induced psychosis. Regardless of the cause, antipsychotic meds can help manage the symptoms.

And here's the good news: Speed psychosis usually decreases and stops once crystal use stops. But if we've used a lot for a long time, it can take longer.

Wait a minute! I take an antidepressant and I use crystal...

Crystal causes serious changes to our brain chemistry. Some of these changes can induce symptoms that mimic or match depression. And these changes can decrease the benefits and effectiveness of antidepressant medications.

If our psychiatrist is really old school and has given us a monoamine oxidase inhibitor (MAOI), like Nardil or Marplan, we already might have increased blood pressure. Adding crystal to the mix can create a spike in blood pressure and that's dangerous. Some of the less archaic antidepressants, like Elavil and Pamelor, are tricyclics (TCAs) and when mixed with crystal might cause some of the same problems as MAOIs can.

Of the selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs), Paxil, and Prozac can increase the potency of crystal, **but not in the fun way you might think!** The same amount of crystal will make you higher than you want to be, making you overamp. Rarely this increased potency can lead to fatal overdose.

Cymbalta and Effexor, a couple of the newer antidepressants that inhibit the reuptake of both serotonin and norepinephrine, can also cause us the same blood pressure problems that TCAs and MAOIs do if mixed with crystal.

And then there are the atypicals like Wellbutrin. Some of these are being researched to see if they help those of us trying to quit deal with depression and cravings for crystal.

Regardless of what antidepressant we might be taking, doing crystal can diminish the effectiveness of the medication.



Thanks for checking out how crystal meth affects our moods!
The more we know, the better the decisions we can make
about our drug use.

For more information on crystal meth or for other resources
in San Francisco, visit us at www.tweaker.org or send an
email to info@tweaker.org

Want to talk about your crystal use?
The counselors at The Stonewall Project are ready to listen!
Call them at (415)487-3100 or visit stonewallsf.org

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