

Study clarifies the oral consequences of methamphetamine abuse

December 1 2015, by Brianna Aldrich

A multidisciplinary group of researchers from the UCLA School of Dentistry, the UCLA Fielding School of Public Health and the UCLA Integrated Substance Abuse Program have published new findings that provide conclusive evidence of disproportionately high rates of dental disease in methamphetamine abusers.

In the largest study of meth abusers to date, Dr. Vivek Shetty and his colleagues systematically investigated the patterns and severity of [dental disease](#) in 571 methamphetamine abusers. The team found that over 96 percent of those studied experienced dental cavities and 58 percent had untreated tooth decay. Only 23 percent retained all of their natural teeth, compared 48 percent for the general population in the U.S.

The study also found that women methamphetamine abusers had higher rates of tooth loss and decay, as well as a greater prevalence of cavities in the front teeth.

The researchers also looked at the rate of periodontitis—serious gum infection that can lead to tooth loss—among methamphetamine abusers. They found that it was unusually high, with more than 89 percent showing total periodontitis. Methamphetamine abusers who were older, who were African American or who smoked cigarettes were more likely to suffer from severe periodontitis.

The study also found that 40 percent of the methamphetamine abusers were self-conscious or embarrassed about the condition of their teeth or

dentures.

The study provides valuable research and [public health](#) insight into the oral health of methamphetamine abusers and informs general [health](#) providers and addiction specialists about the [oral health problems](#) in meth abusers. The prevalence and patterns of dental and periodontal disease could alert dentists to undisclosed methamphetamine use in their patients and help in the development of treatment plans.

The [high rates](#) of dental disease and the concerns about dental appearance among methamphetamine abusers could be used by dentists as the basis for screening, brief behavioral interventions and referrals for treatment.

More information: Vivek Shetty et al. Dental disease patterns in methamphetamine users, *The Journal of the American Dental Association* (2015). [DOI: 10.1016/j.adaj.2015.09.012](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adaj.2015.09.012)

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