

up with demand. "About 70 percent of the meth seized in the country comes from California," says José Martínez of the Drug Enforcement Agency's Los Angeles division. It's so easy to find meth in L.A. that one writer who had a pitch meeting with a director after a two-day crystal binge laughs when asked how to procure it. "Just go to the corner of Santa Monica and Highland," he says. "Or, since tweakers love sugar, hit any 24-hour coffee-doughnut shop, look for the nearest black guy—they seem to have cornered the market—and touch your nose. He'll come right up to you with some."

Trudging through a Hollywood Hole in One isn't usually required. Reef Karim, a psychiatrist and an addiction expert at UCLA, says, "A member of one of my research studies would say he could search all day long for cocaine or other stimulants but couldn't walk five steps without tripping over meth." And prominent industry players needn't bother with the nuisance of procuring, anyway. "Wannabes and climbers will supply drugs gratis just to be next to who they think they should be around," says a high-ranking studio executive who found remnants of crystal meth in his house after a recent party.

Oddly enough, of all the drugs that have enjoyed a heyday in Hollywood—cocaine, heroin, painkillers, marijuana—meth is probably best suited to the lifestyle of a studio executive. A drug that initially seems to increase productivity and elicits rapid euphoria has particular pull in a city where you can

go from being a couch-sleeping mail-room peon to a millionaire bigwig in just a few years. "There's this sense here that people just lucked out and the rules don't apply," says the producer who used to have the studio deal. "People think that they can do drugs all night, make excuses for not coming in to work, and keep their jobs." There's also no denying the appeal of a drug that all but guarantees weight loss. "You look cut, lean, and cool after a bender," says a sometime screenwriter who looked so good after a three-day run that he landed a modeling agent.

The high lasts 6 to 10 hours, and nearly every experience with the drug goes on for several appetite-suppressed days. ("I would think I could do a little bit and then it would be four days later" seemed to be the general theme at a recent Crystal Meth Anonymous meeting in West Hollywood.) As the hours and days pass, the need for sustenance is replaced by other desires equally appropriate to Hollywood: "Crystal sex is just mad," says the sometime screenwriter, a straight guy who cheerfully recounts a story of a binge that ended with "an S&M chick whipping and fucking me in the ass for two hours." A former production executive calls sex on crystal "very dark, like a bad night in Berlin. You'd expose yourself to children."

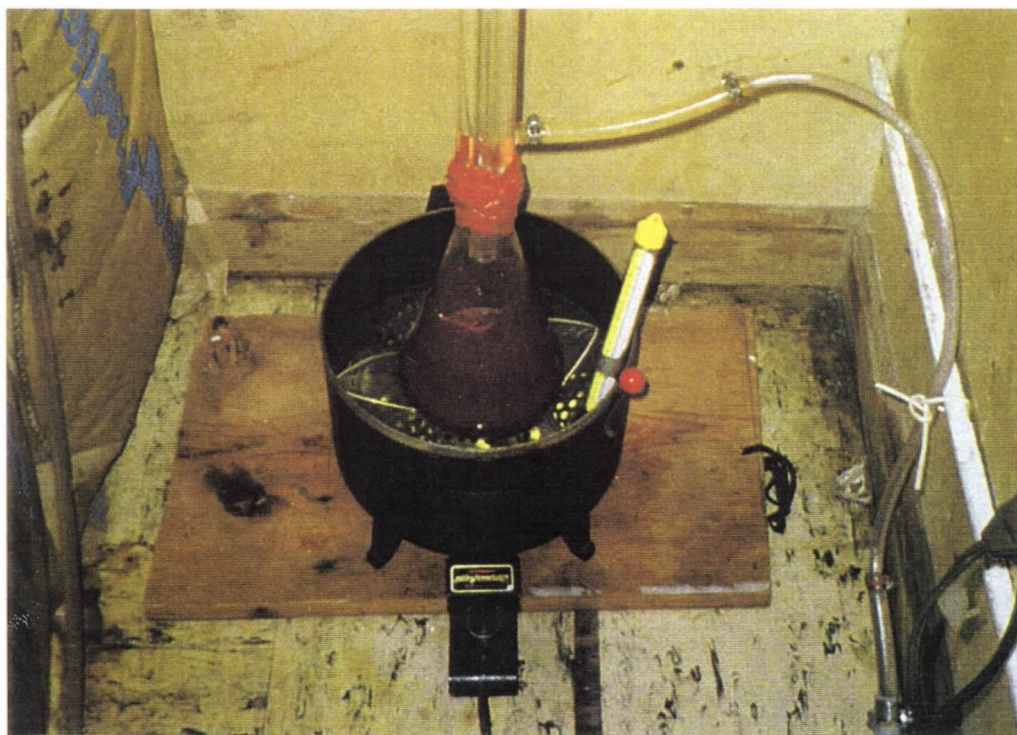
Instant weight loss and wild sex have their appeal, but crystal wreaks havoc on the body: "Over time, or in some cases immediately, people become psychotic—getting auditory, visual, or tactile hallucina-

tions," Karim explains. "Crystal meth alters the dopamine in your system, which can permanently change your decision-making ability." Meth users are at greater risk for heart attacks, seizures, and strokes. Because crystal stays in your body so much longer than other stimulants, the risk of long-term—or even permanent—damage is that much greater, as are the chances of that damage being irreversible.

In an industry where it's common for executives to cancel lunches 10 times before they take place, agents brag about how well they lie, and publicists release statements announcing that a client who's a known addict passed out because of dehydration, it takes more than a little psychotic acting out to raise eyebrows. Even when the rumor mill attributes someone's erratic nature to drugs—and, unlike the gay rumors, this one is always true—"it's tolerated in some unspoken, gentlemen's-agreement kind of way," says the studio executive who found crystal at his house after the party. "We're in what I'd call the Paris Hilton era, where there's no outrage, recriminations, or judgments about aberrant behavior." Writer-director Roger Kumble, whose 2003 hit play *Turnaround* featured Tom Everett Scott as a screenwriter who faces hard moral choices after he's recovered from a cocaine binge, doesn't think everyone gets a free pass. "Sometimes the entertainment industry turns a blind eye when it comes to drug addiction and sometimes they don't," he says. "It depends on the status of the person in question." A soft-spoken producer who spent the better part of his career as a top agent marvels at the generosity of the agency that ultimately fired him when he missed work and lost clients. After two unsuccessful stints in rehab—during which he was paid his full salary—the agency let him go with enough money to live well for at least a year. "I'm really grateful to be in a business that's understanding," he says, admitting that he probably spent six figures on drugs over a two-or-three-year period.

Despite multiple cautionary tales, Hollywood insiders continue to be infatuated with meth. "There is a high demand for it," says Dr. Cyrus Rangan, assistant medical director of the California Poison Control System, "and there are so many 'experts' who can gather supplies in Tijuana and synthesize the drug themselves. It's only going to continue to be a problem."

Todd is one of the fortunate ones. He hasn't done crystal in over a year. He never lost his job. And now he can smile at the irony of the fact that Lisa, his paid companion and former drug connection, was actually the one who gave him a ride to rehab. In fact, the last time Todd spoke to Lisa she was sober. "Fourteen days," Todd adds with a shrug. "Maybe she'll get it. I hope she does." ■



HOME COOKIN': METH IS EASY FOR THE AVERAGE PERSON TO MAKE WITH INSTRUCTIONS DOWNLOADED FROM THE INTERNET. AN L.A. ATTORNEY WHO MADE HIS OWN SPEED SAID IT WOULD TAKE HIM ONE NIGHT TO COOK UP A BATCH.