

fast facts

Cat

■ **Overview:** Methcathinone or “cat” is a synthetic stimulant similar to the natural drug plant *khat*, which has been used for centuries in east Africa. “Cooked” by bath-

tub chemists from the legal stimulant ephedrine and such easily-obtained (and highly-toxic) industrial chemicals as

battery acid, lye, and paint thinner, “cat” first appeared as a street drug in the Midwest during the 1990’s.

■ **Street Names:** Cat, goob, star.

■ **Appearance:** White or off-white powder which can be snorted, injected, or swallowed.

■ **Actions/Effects:** Like methamphetamine and other central nervous system stimulants, methcathinone can reduce fatigue and block hunger. And just like other stimulants, the drug can also trigger impulsive, erratic behavior by increasing the action and supply of two main neurotransmitters, *norepinephrine* and *dopamine*. At higher dosages, or with chronic use, feelings of heightened confidence and arousal can quickly spin off into paranoia, irritability, and severe depression.



Cat in the act: lab seizure.



■ **Medical Uses:** None. First synthesized in 1928 and tested as both a diet drug and antidepressant, methcathinone's dangers were thought to outweigh its potential value and it was never distributed commercially in the United States.

■ **Risks/Side Effects:** Physical side effects include loss of appetite, profuse sweating, dehydration, elevated heart rate and body temperature, and uncontrolled shaking. Psychological effects include anxiety and irritability. Tolerance often develops rapidly as does dependence. Early withdrawal symptoms of anxiety and profuse sweating can precede convulsions, hallucinations, and severe depression.



Methcathinone. AKA "cat."

■ **Duration:** Four to six hours. Cat users, like users of crystal and other stimulants, often stay on "runs" for days at a time, then sleep for a day or more before starting another binge.

■ **Legal Status:** Unrestricted when it first appeared, methcathinone was designated a Schedule I controlled substance by the Drug Enforcement Administration in 1993. Since then, hundreds of cat labs have been seized throughout the Midwest.

■ **Trends:** Still largely a regional phenomenon, methcathinone has expanded beyond its Midwestern base in recent years, mostly due to ease of manufacture and the continuing demand for stimulant drugs.



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