

Speed



Better Health Good Health Care

NSW HEALTH

What are amphetamines ('speed')?

Amphetamines are a group of drugs made from different chemicals. Amphetamines are stimulant drugs. This means they speed up the brain and nervous system. Most people call amphetamines 'speed'. Other names include 'crystal meth', 'base', 'ice' or 'shabu' (in this fact sheet we will call it 'speed').

Forms of speed

Sometimes, but not often, doctors give amphetamine drugs to treat some health problems. But mostly, people use speed that is made illegally.

Speed usually comes in the form of white or yellow powder, and people either sniff it through the nose ('snort' it) or inject it. It can also be swallowed, in the form of tablets or capsules.

People who sell speed often mix or 'cut' the powder with other things that look the same, to make the drug go further. Some mixed-in substances can have unpleasant or harmful effects. It is difficult to tell what the drug actually contains.

Effects

What speed does to you depends on:

- how much you take and how pure it is
- your height and weight
- your general health
- your mood
- your past experience with speed
- whether you use speed on its own or with other drugs
- whether you use alone or with others, at home or at a party, etc.



Immediate effects

Small amounts

When you take a small amount of speed, the effects can last from a few hours to a few days.

You may:

- feel very good and confident
- feel alert and energetic
- be excited or agitated
- talk a lot
- feel aggressive
- feel anxious or panicky
- take more risks than usual.

Effects on your body may include that:

- your heart beats faster
- you breathe faster
- you feel less hungry
- your blood pressure rises
- the pupils in your eyes get bigger
- you move more quickly
- it is hard to sleep.

Large amounts

If you take a large amount of speed you might:

- get headaches
- feel dizzy
- feel restless
- shake
- have irregular breathing
- have a very fast or irregular heartbeat
- become pale
- feel very powerful or better than others
- become hostile or aggressive
- have psychosis — a serious psychological problem where you hear voices, imagine things, fear that others want to hurt you.



Long-term effects

If you use speed often and for a long time you may:

- become dependent on speed (see 'Tolerance and dependence', page 8)
- often become violent for no reason
- get sick more often because your body can't resist disease properly
- be upset or depressed
- have periods of psychosis (see page 4)
- have relationship, work, money, legal or housing problems.

The way a person takes speed over a long time can also cause some problem.

- Snorting speed can lead to nosebleeds, sinus problems and damage inside the nose.
- Injecting speed with used or dirty needles or other equipment makes you more likely to get infected with hepatitis C, hepatitis B and/or HIV, get blood poisoning (septicaemia) and skin abscesses (sores with pus).

- Injecting speed over a long time can result in:
 - blocked blood vessels (caused by the things sometimes mixed with speed) leading to serious damage to the body's organs such as the liver, heart etc.
 - inflamed blood vessels and abscesses.
- Injecting speed also increases the risk of becoming dependent on the drug and of getting other health problems.

Overdose

Overdose of speed can happen to anyone. Even small amounts may cause overdose with some people who have an especially strong reaction to it.

When a person overdoses, it may cause:

- amphetamine psychosis
- faster, irregular or weak heart beat
- heart attack
- bleeding blood vessels in the brain
- very high fever
- death (rarely).

Mixing speed with other drugs

People who use speed sometimes take other drugs at the same time to cope with some of the things speed does to the body. Some people take drugs such as minor tranquillisers, alcohol, marijuana or heroin to help them sleep.

This can make you dependent on several drugs at once. For example, some people need speed each day to get them going and minor tranquillisers each night to get to sleep. This type of dependence can lead to many serious physical and psychological problems.

Mixing different drugs can also make you more likely to overdose.

Speed and pregnancy

Using speed when you are pregnant may increase the chance of losing the baby before it is born, having the baby too early and other problems. Babies of speed-using mothers may weigh less and may get withdrawal symptoms from the mother's speed use. Little is known about the long-term effects on the child as it grows.

Tolerance and dependence

Anyone can develop a 'tolerance' to speed. Tolerance means that you must take more of the drug to feel the same effects you used to have with lower amounts.

'Dependence' on speed means that it takes up a lot of your thoughts, emotions and activities.

Dependence on speed can lead to a variety of health, money, legal, work and relationship problems.

Not all people who use speed are dependent.

Withdrawal

People who are dependent on speed may find it very hard to stop using or cut down because of withdrawal symptoms.

These can include:

- tiredness
- hunger
- feeling anxious
- feeling irritable
- deep depression (feeling very down or sad)



- being 'nervy' or restless
- feeling angry or upset
- long but disturbed sleep
- wanting speed very badly (cravings).

These symptoms are usually fairly short-lived and most withdrawing people don't need medication. However, if you are worried about withdrawal, contact your doctor or health centre.

Speed and the law

Using, keeping, selling or giving speed to someone else is illegal. If you are caught you could get penalties starting from a \$2 200 fine and/or two years in jail to a \$550 000 fine and/or jail for life.

Speed and driving

Speed can make you feel more confident when you drive. This can make you take dangerous risks and have accidents. It is illegal to drive under the influence of drugs, including speed. Penalties include losing your licence, a fine and/or jail.

24 hour confidential telephone counselling service

NSW

Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS)
Ph: (02) 9361 2111 Toll free: 1800 422 599

Victoria

Direct Line Ph: (03) 9416 1818
Toll free: 1800 136 385

Western Australia

Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS)
Ph: (08) 9442 5000 Toll free: 1800 198 024

Queensland

Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS)
Ph: (07) 3236 2414 Toll free: 1800 177 833

South Australia

Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS)
Toll free: 1300 131 340

Northern Territory

Amity Community Service
Ph: (08) 8981 8030 Toll free: 1800 629 683

Tasmania

Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS)
Toll free number: 1800 811 994

ACT

24 hour Alcohol and Drug Help line
Ph: (02) 6205 4545



The information in this document can be accessed through the NSW HealthWeb site: www.health.nsw.gov.au or directly viewed from CEIDA's website: www.ceida.net.au.

Other publications in this series include *Marijuana, Cocaine, Alcohol, Heroin, Ecstasy, Benzos and Hallucinogens.*

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