

See also “What can you do to reduce or minimise harm - The most harm - Overdose” (See page 50 - A Guide to Coping)

Speed makes people feel uninhibited. Using speed with alcohol severely increases the risks of unsafe driving, sex, or drug use - with the accompanying risks of death, infection and injury. Injecting speed users are at risk of transmission of infectious diseases such as Hepatitis C and HIV (AIDS). See **FACT SHEET** No.9 for more information about infectious diseases.

Detox and Treatment

Private and public medical and non-medical detox centres are available for amphetamine withdrawal. Contact NUAA or ADIS for your nearest service. See **FACT SHEET** No.1 **Contacts**. Your local area Health Service will also be able to advise you on local facilities.

Detox takes from 3-5 days and is characterised by the symptoms listed above. With professional support supervised home detox is possible. See **FACT SHEET** No.15 for more information about home detox. Make sure a medical practitioner or drug and alcohol professional is available at all hours for information and support. Call 000 if anything goes wrong, or you feel you can't cope.

Detoxification is not a cure for dependency. Users have come to rely on speed for enjoying themselves and feeling good, and commonly feel unable to participate in social activities without using speed. Ongoing treatment, support and counselling may be necessary to resolve the dependency and promote abstinence.

Commonly, paranoia and anxiety symptoms occurring as part of amphetamine withdrawal may make the withdrawing user aggressive and irrational. Do not put yourself or your family at risk especially if you feel threatened by violent behaviour.

With acknowledgement to NDARC.



Amphetamine

Common Names

Currently in Australia amphetamine comes in many different forms and users refer to it with many different names, including speed, go-ee, whiz, uppers, dexies, buzz, rev, crystal, crystal meth, base, pure, ice, shabu and ox blood.

History of the drug

Amphetamines were developed in the United States during the 1920's. By the 1960's doctors in Australia were prescribing them as a decongestant and to treat obesity and depression. During World War II and the Korean and Vietnam Wars soldiers on all sides of the conflicts were given amphetamine to keep them awake, to give them more energy and to suppress their appetites.

Forms of the drug

The term 'amphetamine' refers to a whole family of synthetic drugs that are all chemically related to amphetamine and all have pretty similar effects. The amphetamine family of drugs falls into the class of drugs known as stimulants. Speed is manufactured illegally and is available as a powder that can vary in texture from very fine to more coarse and crystalline, and can also vary in colour from white to yellow, pink or brownish, or is occasionally found in liquid form. All these variations occur because the purifying process involved in the manufacture of amphetamine is quite tricky and most of the people who make the drug don't have the chemical expertise to do it properly. This means that, although they're all making speed, they end up with a wide range of products at the end of the manufacturing process, which look different and contain different impurities. 'Base' is an oily powder. 'Ice' and 'shabu' are strong and more potent forms of amphetamine that come in the form of a crystal rather than a powder. 'Ox blood' is a liquid form of speed.

No matter what form it comes in, almost all the speed available in Australia today is methamphetamine. Methamphetamine is slightly different in chemical terms to amphetamine, but the two have very similar effects. Although the availability and use of crystalline forms of methamphetamine are increasing, most of the speed available in Australia these days still comes in the form of powder.

Speed may be swallowed, snorted or injected. Some of the people who use the crystalline forms known as 'ice' or 'shabu' smoke it in a special glass pipe. Injecting and smoking are the more harmful ways to use speed. Injecting is the most dangerous method of use as tolerance develops quickly.

Tablets with chemical compositions similar to amphetamines such as dexamphetamine, Duromine and Ritalin, that are prescribed for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) or for narcolepsy (a condition of constant sleepiness), are occasionally used by speed users for their stimulant properties.

Drug effects

Amphetamines are stimulants and increase the activity of the central nervous system and produce effects similar to the body's naturally occurring 'fight or flight' hormone, adrenalin. The actual effect will depend on the form and type of drug, its purity (as illegal drugs may often be mixed with other substances) as well as the amount taken and whether other drugs, caffeine drinks or alcohol have been consumed as well. The person's expectations and experience with the drug and the mood and environment they are in will also have an influence on effects. Speed users do not usually know exactly what is in the drug they are taking. Amphetamines are rapidly absorbed from oral consumption and reach a peak concentration in two hours with the effect of a single dose lasting from 5 to 20 hours. When amphetamines are injected the effect is rapid and wears off quickly.

The short-term effects of using amphetamine may include:

- euphoria and well-being
- increased energy and hyperactivity
- talkativeness
- reduction of appetite
- dry mouth
- increased blood pressure and heart rate
- nausea

The long-term effects of using amphetamine may include:

- sleep problems
- extreme mood swings
- compulsive repetition of actions
- paranoia
- depression and anxiety
- panic attacks
- seizures
- social and financial problems

One of the greatest problems experienced by amphetamine users is amphetamine-induced psychosis or 'speed psychosis'. The symptoms of speed psychosis are similar to those of paranoid schizophrenia, and may include:

- hallucinations
- paranoid delusions
- uncontrolled violent behaviour

This state usually disappears after the drug has been eliminated from the body, although the user remains vulnerable to further episodes. If the drug is used again, the psychosis may recur. Regular users can develop a tolerance to speed and will need higher amounts to get the same effects as before. Some people can also become dependent on speed. They have a strong desire to continue its use and if speed is unavailable they may panic or become anxious. Users may take speed continually over a long period followed by a period of exhaustion and crashing, during which time sedatives such as benzos or heroin may be taken to aid in "coming down".

Withdrawal

When a dependent person stops using speed or severely cuts down the amount they use they may experience symptoms such as:

- Fatigue
- Hunger
- Deep depression
- Disturbed sleep
- Irritability
- Agitation and anxiety

Overdose

The risk of amphetamine overdose is low but can cause brain haemorrhage, heart attack, high fever or coma. Deaths may occur if overdose is not medically treated. Call an ambulance DIAL 000 immediately if someone:

- Has heart palpitations, shortness of breath, wheezing, fitting, severe headache, blurred vision, or collapses into unconsciousness following the use of speed
- Passes out or becomes unable to speak or move, but is still breathing and has a pulse. Move them so they are lying on their side
- If breathing stops but a pulse can be felt, commence mouth to mouth resuscitation. If a pulse is felt DO NOT attempt CPR