

# Amphetamines

## What are amphetamines?

Amphetamines are stimulant drugs, which means they speed up the messages travelling between the brain and the body.

Some types of amphetamines are legally prescribed by doctors to treat conditions such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and narcolepsy (where a person has an uncontrollable urge to sleep). Other types of amphetamines such as speed are produced and sold illegally. The more potent form, crystal methamphetamine (ice), is covered in a separate fact sheet.

The appearance of amphetamines varies. These drugs may be in the form of a powder, tablets and capsules. They may be packaged in 'foils' (aluminium foil), plastic bags or small balloons when sold illegally.

Amphetamine powder can range in colour from white through to brown, sometimes it may have traces of grey or pink. It has a strong smell and bitter taste. Amphetamine capsules and tablets vary considerably in colour.

Illegally produced amphetamines can be a mix of drugs, binding agents, caffeine and sugar. New psychoactive substances may also be added.

### Slang names

Speed, fast, up, uppers, louee, goey, whiz.

### How are they used?

Amphetamines are generally swallowed, injected or smoked. They are also snorted.

## Effects of amphetamines

**There is no safe level of drug use.** Use of any drug always carries some risk. It's important to be careful when taking any type of drug.

Amphetamines affects everyone differently, based on:

- Size, weight and health
- Whether the person is used to taking it
- Whether other drugs are taken around the same time
- The amount taken
- The strength of the drug (varies from batch to batch with illegally produced drugs)

The effects of amphetamines may be felt immediately (if injected or smoked) or within 30 minutes (if snorted or swallowed).

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The following effects may be experienced:

- Happiness and confidence
- Talking more and feeling energetic
- Repeating simple things like itching and scratching
- Large pupils and dry mouth
- Fast heart beat and breathing
- Teeth grinding
- Reduced appetite
- Excessive sweating
- Increased sex drive

### **Overdose**

If a large amount or a strong batch is taken, it could also cause an overdose. If any of the following effects are experienced an ambulance should be called straight away by dialling triple zero (000). Ambulance officers don't need to involve the police.

- Racing heartbeat
- Fits
- Passing out
- Stroke, heart attack and death

Snorting amphetamines can damage the nasal passage and cause nose bleeds.

Injecting amphetamines and sharing needles can increase the risk of:

- Hepatitis B
- Hepatitis C
- HIV/AIDS
- Tetanus

### **Coming down**

In the 4 to 6 days after inhalant use, the following effects may be experienced:

- Restless sleep and exhaustion
- Headaches
- Dizziness and blurred vision
- Paranoia, hallucinations and confusion
- Irritability, mood swings and depression

Using a depressant drug such as alcohol, benzodiazepines or cannabis to help with the 'come down' effects may result in a cycle of dependence on both types of drugs.

### **Long term effects**

Regular use of amphetamines may eventually cause:

- Reduced appetite and extreme weight loss
- Restless sleep
- Dry mouth and dental problems
- Regular colds and flu
- Trouble concentrating
- Difficulty breathing
- Muscle stiffness
- Anxiety and paranoia

- Depression
- Heart and kidney problems
- Increased risk of stroke
- Needing to use more to get the same effect
- Dependence on amphetamines
- Financial, work and social problems

### **Amphetamine psychosis**

High doses and frequent heavy use can also create an 'amphetamine psychosis', characterised by paranoid delusions, hallucinations and out of character aggressive or violent behaviour. These symptoms usually disappear a few days after the person stops using amphetamines.

### **Mixing amphetamines with other drugs**

The effects of taking amphetamines with other drugs – including over-the-counter or prescribed medications – can be unpredictable and dangerous, and could cause:

**Amphetamines + some antidepressants:** elevated blood pressure, which can lead to irregular heartbeat, heart failure and stroke.

**Amphetamines + alcohol, cannabis or benzodiazepines:** the body is placed under a high degree of stress as it attempts to deal with the conflicting effects of both types of drugs, which can lead to an overdose.

### **Withdrawal**

Giving up amphetamines after using them for a long time is challenging because the body has to get used to functioning without them. Withdrawal symptoms should settle down after a week and will mostly disappear after a month. Symptoms include:

- Cravings for amphetamines
- Increased appetite
- Confusion and irritability
- Aches and pains
- Exhaustion
- Restless sleep and nightmares
- Anxiety, depression and paranoia

References for this fact sheet are available at: [druginfo.adf.org.au](http://druginfo.adf.org.au).

### Further Information

The Druginfo website has information on:

- Ice
- New psychoactive substances
- Help & support services
- Treatment
- Drug facts

Go to [druginfo.adf.org.au](http://druginfo.adf.org.au)

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