

(Speed, Whiz, Go-Fast, Crank, P, Burn, Crystal, Ice)

Speed can be the ultimate party drug. You'll fly through the night with the greatest of ease. While you're having a great time, your body will be drained of vital ingredients, which could turn out to be the least of your problems.

There are three different types of amphetamine type stimulants (ATS): amphetamine sulphate (strong), dextroamphetamine (stronger) and methamphetamine (the strongest). Increasingly, amphetamine is being sold in its pure form, i.e. methamphetamine 'P', and is sold by the 'point' (0.1 of a gram; 10 points = 1 gram). 'P' is more harmful and more addictive than other amphetamines as it is ten times more potent.

Locally manufactured methamphetamine is usually referred to as Pure, P or Burn. Higher quality methamphetamine is usually imported and is referred to as Ice because the purer the methamphetamine is, the more it looks like crystals or ice.

Illegally manufactured amphetamines are usually sold as a powder or crystals, though they are also available as pills. Yaba (Thai for 'crazy medicine', also known as 'reds') are small red methamphetamine pills of high potency, usually imported from Asia.

Also available on the black market are amphetamine-like pills which are manufactured by legitimate pharmaceutical companies for the treatment of various medical conditions (e.g. Ritalin, Tenuate, Ponderax and Duromine).

Illegally manufactured amphetamines are often are cut with other substances such as caffeine or glucose. Any illegally manufactured drugs can contain traces of other drugs or the very toxic chemicals used in the manufacturing process.

Illegal use, possession or supply of amphetamines can carry heavy fines and/or prison sentences.

Speeding - the immediate effects

This depends on a person's tolerance, the dose and how it's taken (snorted, eaten, shelved, smoked or injected). Speed works like cocaine.

Neurotransmitters (natural substances that influence the brain's functioning such as dopamine, acetylcholine and serotonin) are affected and adrenaline and noradrenaline are released increasing brain activity.

With a moderate dose the short-term effects include:

- Euphoria.
- Brain and nervous system activity is stimulated - pupils become enlarged, increased alertness, hyperactivity, talkativeness, anxiety, irritability, suspiciousness, increased energy or sense of well-being, panic attacks, and inability to sleep.
- Reduced appetite.
- Increased heart and breathing rates.
- Increased blood pressure.
- Dehydration.

Possible additional effects include:

- Jaw clenching.
- Excessive sweating (clammy hands and feet) and/or pale skin.
- Headaches.
- Irregular breathing.
- Rapid or irregular heart beat.
- Feelings of superiority, delusions and paranoia.
- In males, temporary impotency.

An overdose can result in:

- Muscle spasms, fits (convulsions, seizures), irregular heartbeat, high blood pressure and high temperature.
- A chance of burst blood vessels in the brain, a heart attack or stroke and sometimes death.

Amphetamines, continued

Long-term effects - possible from regular use (or minimal use in vulnerable people),

- Insomnia, frequent waking, lethargy and irritability.
- Depression, anxiety,
- Weight loss, nutritional deficiencies, especially calcium, causing receding gums and skin rashes.
- Scratching or picking at your skin.
- Irregular heartbeat and high blood pressure (increased chance of heart attack or strokes).
- Women can experience interrupted or irregular periods (menstrual cycles).
- Weakened immune system (get sick easier).
- Obsessive, repetitive behaviour and thoughts, even after use is discontinued.
- Extreme jealousy, paranoia.
- Psychotic episodes (e.g. hallucinations, paranoia, belief in having special powers). Particularly dangerous for those with a history of violence.
- After one psychotic episode even small doses may trigger another psychotic episode.
- Methamphetamine is more likely to cause brain damage than other speed.

Harm Reduction

- No use is the safest choice.
- Eat well beforehand for energy reserves. Drink plenty of water (600ml per hour), especially if dancing.
- Avoid alcohol and caffeinated drinks, which further dehydrate you.
- Combining speed with alcohol or other drugs overworks the system - especially the liver - and the effects are unpredictable.
- Catch up on fluids, food and sleep the next day to help recovery.
- Avoid using amphetamine when taking medications like antidepressants.
- If snorting speed, ensure it is finely chopped with a razor or knife and use alternate nostrils.

- Taking speed orally is generally safer than smoking, injecting, or snorting it because the stomach can handle acidic substances better than your lungs, veins, or nose.
- Putting speed in empty pill capsules or wrapped in cigarette papers and drinking plenty of water reduces the damage if swallowing.
- IV use carries increased risks of HIV and hepatitis if needles (and other equipment) are shared, plus potential damage to veins and organs.
- Avoid IV Ritalin use completely as it can cause serious blood vessel damage.
- Sex on speed can be rough and long, with sore bits, broken condoms and a greater chance of Sexually Transmitted Infections. Using lube with condoms is safest.
- If you're taking medication to treat HIV or AIDS this can react adversely to speed. Contact your local New Zealand AIDS Foundation branch, or Burnett Clinic if in Auckland, for specific info.
- Brush and floss teeth regularly and sip water. When using amphetamines the blood flow to the gums is reduced and the mouth becomes dry. Also, chewing gum is a good idea if you grind your teeth when speeding.

P has proven to be a fast ride to addiction for many people. In a very short space of time marriages, relationships, houses and careers are lost. Users resort to crimes such as stealing from employers to fuel their habit.

Some users report spending up to \$3000 a week. Even the old hippie drug guru Allen Ginsberg felt compelled to issue a general warning about speed in the 1960s, describing it as "anti-social... paranoid-making... bad for your body and bad for your mind."

We recommend that you contact the Community Alcohol and Drug Services (CADS). CADS are a free, confidential service to support people to make informed choices, and reduce the risks of their alcohol and other drug use. Contact them on 845 1818 or www.cads.org.nz.