

# Amphetamines ●

## What are amphetamines?

Amphetamines are stimulant drugs, which means they speed up the messages travelling between the brain and the body.<sup>1</sup>

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 of the drug is crystal methamphetamine, also known as ‘ice’.<sup>1</sup>

### What do they look like?

The appearance of amphetamines varies. These drugs may be in the form of a powder, tablets, crystals and capsules. They may be packaged in ‘foils’ (aluminium foil), plastic bags or small balloons when sold illegally.<sup>2</sup>

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 size and colour.<sup>1</sup>

The gross weight of amphetamines purchased on the street often includes substantial amounts of diluents and impurities. Also, street drug sellers or ‘pushers’ often misrepresent, either knowingly or unknowingly, the substances that they are selling. As a result, amphetamines bought on the street may actually be partly, or entirely made up of one of the weaker stimulants such as ephedrine or caffeine.<sup>1</sup>

### Slang names

Speed, fast, up, uppers, louee, goey, whiz.<sup>2</sup>

### How are they used?

Amphetamines are generally swallowed, injected or smoked. They are also snorted.<sup>2</sup>

## 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 affect 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).

You might feel the effects of amphetamines immediately (if injected or smoked) or within 30 minutes (if snorted or swallowed).

You might experience:

- happiness and confidence
- talking more and feeling energetic
- large pupils and dry mouth
- fast heart beat and breathing
- teeth grinding
- reduced appetite
- increased sex drive.<sup>1,2,3</sup>

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

If injecting drugs there is an increased risk of:

- tetanus
- infection
- vein damage.

If sharing needles there is an increased risk of:

- hepatitis B
- hepatitis C
- HIV and AIDS.<sup>2</sup>

## Overdose

If you take a large amount or have a strong batch, you could overdose. If you have any of the following symptoms, call an ambulance straight away by dialling triple zero (000). Ambulance officers don't need to involve the police. Symptoms of overdose may include:

- racing heartbeat
- fits
- passing out or breathing difficulties
- chills or fever
- no urine output
- arching of the back/convulsions
- stroke, heart attack and death.<sup>1,2</sup>

Find out more about overdose at [adf.org.au/insights/overdose](http://adf.org.au/insights/overdose).

## Coming down

In the 2 to 4 days after amphetamine use, you may be experience:

- restless sleep and exhaustion
- headaches
- paranoia, hallucinations and confusion
- twitching and muscle aches
- fluctuating temperatures
- irritability, mood swings and depression.<sup>4</sup>

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
- anxiety and paranoia
- depression
- increased risk of stroke
- needing to use more to get the same effect
- dependence on amphetamines
- financial, work and social problems.<sup>1,2,3,4,5</sup>

## 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.<sup>1,2</sup>

## 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.<sup>4</sup>

**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.<sup>6</sup>

## 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.<sup>2</sup>

Find out more about withdrawal at [adf.org.au/alcohol-drug-use/supporting-a-loved-one/withdrawal/](http://adf.org.au/alcohol-drug-use/supporting-a-loved-one/withdrawal/)

## Getting help

If your use of amphetamines is affecting your health, family, relationships, work, school, financial or other life situations, you can find help and support.

Help and support services directory:  
[adf.org.au/help-support/support-services-directory/](http://adf.org.au/help-support/support-services-directory/)

Information about treatment:  
[adf.org.au/alcohol-drug-use/supporting-a-loved-one/treatment/](http://adf.org.au/alcohol-drug-use/supporting-a-loved-one/treatment/)

## Amphetamines and the law

Use of amphetamines is restricted. They can only be prescribed by a medical practitioner for medical reasons.

Federal and state laws provide penalties for possessing, using, making, selling or driving under the influence of amphetamines without a prescription from an authorised person. There are also laws against forging or altering a prescription or making false representation to obtain amphetamines or a prescription for them. Laws have been introduced that prevent the sale and possession of ice pipes in some states and territories.

## Amphetamine statistics

### National

- 6.3% of Australians aged 14 years and over have used meth/amphetamines one or more times in their life.<sup>7</sup>
- 1.4% of Australians aged 14 years and over have used meth/amphetamines in the previous 12 months. Of these people, 57.3% report crystal or ice as main form of the drug used.<sup>7</sup>

### Young people

- 2.4% of 12-17 year olds have tried amphetamines.<sup>8</sup>
- Young Australians (aged 14–24) first try meth/amphetamines at 18.6 years on average.<sup>7</sup>

### References

1. Brands, B., Sproule, B., & Marshman, J. (Eds.). (1998). *Drugs & drug abuse* (3rd ed.). Ontario: Addiction Research Foundation.
2. Campbell, A. (2000). *The Australian illicit drug guide*. Melbourne: Black Inc.
3. Upfal, J. (2006). *The Australian drug guide* (7th ed.). Melbourne: Black Inc.
4. Independent Scientific Committee on Drugs. (2013). *Amphetamine/‘Speed’*.
5. Inaba, D., Cohen, W., von Radics, E., Cholewa, E., (2014). *Uppers, Downers and All Rounders*. Cns Productions
6. *Amphetamines and Alcohol*. (2018), retrieved from <https://amphetamines.com/alcohol>
7. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2017). *National Drug Strategy Household Survey detailed report 2016*. Canberra: AIHW.
8. White, V., & Williams, T. (2016). *Australian secondary school students’ use of tobacco, alcohol, and over-the-counter and illicit substances in 2014*. Melbourne: The Cancer Council, Victoria.

Always call an ambulance on triple zero (000) if an overdose is suspected: tell the paramedic exactly what has been taken. Paramedics are there to help and will not involve the police unless there is a danger to themselves or others.

### Other help, support services and resources

Links to further help and support • [adf.org.au/help-support/](http://adf.org.au/help-support/)

Information on methamphetamine impacts and emerging treatments • [adf.org.au/insights/methamphetamine-impacts-treatment/](http://adf.org.au/insights/methamphetamine-impacts-treatment/)

### For information on treatment

There are a range of treatment services available to support the recovery from alcohol and drug misuse. To find out more information about treatment services in your area, contact the alcohol and drug intake and assessment service.

**ACSO • 1300 022 760**

(9am–5pm Monday–Friday)

DirectLine is also available to provide free and confidential information, counselling and referral for alcohol and drug issues 24 hours a day 7 days a week.

DirectLine • 1800 888 236 • [www.directline.org.au](http://www.directline.org.au)

### ● Further information

**Ice Advice Line • 1800 423 238**

Help and support lines (24 hours, 7 days a week)

**Family Drug Help • 1300 660 068 • [www.familydrughelp.com.au](http://www.familydrughelp.com.au)** (Victorian-based)

Services are available to support those around you who may be affected by your drug use. As well as providing understanding, they can provide information about how best to help during treatment.

**Family Drug Support • 1300 368 186 • [www.fds.org.au](http://www.fds.org.au)** (Australia-wide)



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