

6. Amphetamines

(2021 version)

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Introduction

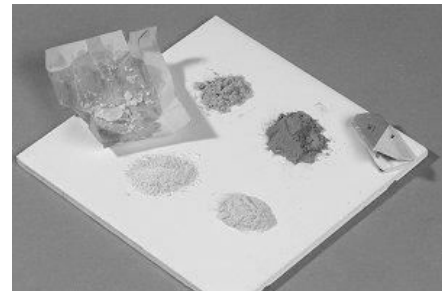
Amphetamines are synthetically produced stimulants that were developed in Germany during the 1880s. At the time they were considered safe and were believed to have no risk of dependence. Their medical uses were not discovered until the 1930s when they were used for treating asthma, lowering blood pressure and suppressing appetite.

Amphetamines were used widely to help battle-fatigued soldiers during World War II, the Spanish Civil War, and the wars in Korea and Vietnam. By the time of Vietnam it had been discovered how dangerous they could be, but in the meantime their use had been widened to treat many conditions including insomnia, epilepsy, seasickness, impotence, depression and hyperactivity in children. Now it is known how dangerous amphetamines can be, they are no longer used to treat these conditions. During the 1960s amphetamine misuse was widespread, especially amongst young people.

How They Are Taken

There are several ways in which amphetamines are taken:

- Orally – taken as pills and tablets, or in a pink or white powder form licked off the fingers. Some users roll the powder up in a cigarette paper and swallow it. This is called a speed bomb
- Snorting – taken as powder through the nose, like cocaine
- Smoking – methylamphetamine only
- Injecting – directly into a vein
- Suppositories – the drug is ground into a fine powder and mixed with cocoa butter or dairy butter, rolled in a cigarette paper and left to harden in a fridge. The suppository is then covered in lubricant and inserted into the anus where the drug is absorbed into the bloodstream via the mucous membranes.



The two types of amphetamine are amphetamine sulphate and meth (or methyl-) amphetamine.

Amphetamine sulphate is the most common form of amphetamine. It can be found in tablet form, in capsules or as a loose powder (sold in wraps) in a variety of different textures and colours. The capsules may also contain mixtures of amphetamines, shredded LSD paper squares and MDMA (ecstasy). Amphetamines found at street level can have a purity of only 6% and can be adulterated with sugars or other powders that look like the drug, such as lactose, glucose, dried baby milk, caffeine, paracetamol or aspirin.

Methylamphetamine (or methamphetamine) is a stronger form of amphetamine (see separate section below).

Some of the street names for amphetamines are:

· 'A'	· Pep Pills	· Wake-ups
· Beans	· Speed	· Whizz
· Co-pilots	· Sulph	· Jelly
· Eye-openers	· Sweets	· Uppers
· Fast	· Truck drivers	·

Health

Short-term effects

Amphetamine and methylamphetamine are stimulant drugs and their effects can last several hours. The positive effects can include the user feeling more alert, energetic, confident and cheerful, and less bored or tired. With high doses people often experience a rapid flow of ideas and feel they have increased physical and mental powers. The user can also become agitated and aggressive or even panic and suffer from paranoia.

Amphetamines speed up the body's metabolic rate, causing it to use up blood sugar at a faster than normal rate. They also increase breathing and heart rate, lessen appetite and make the pupils dilate and the user can experience dry mouth, sweating, palpitations, increased blood pressure, body temperature and heart rate, increased danger of strokes, nausea, headaches, dizziness and tremors.

Like all drugs, the method taken determines how quickly and how intense the effects will be. If swallowed, the effects come on much slower and are less intense. If snorted, smoked or injected, the effects are quick and, depending on the dose, can be quite intense.

The effects usually wear off after 3 or 4 hours but can last up to 8, after which time the user's blood sugar crashes and they become tired, depressed, lethargic and unable to concentrate. Some people are so badly affected by amphetamine sulphate that they cannot get to sleep even 12 hours after taking a very small dose. It can take the user days before they feel normal again.

As well as causing damage to the veins, injection carries the additional danger of infection (including HIV and Hepatitis B and C) through using dirty needles or poor injecting practice.

The effects that amphetamines can have on the user may make them behave in various ways such as dancing for longer than usual, being very talkative, and sharing ideas which may not make as much sense to others as to themselves.

They may also be aggressive and quickly change from being very happy to being very angry.

Long-term effects

Long-term use can affect the brain of the user and lead to mood swings from confident to anxious and depressed, happy to irritable. Users may experience difficulties in thinking straight, remembering things, problem-solving and coping with their emotions. In its most extreme form this can lead to amphetamine psychosis in which the user becomes paranoid and believes others are persecuting him/her. Long-term use can also affect the body by causing kidney and liver damage. As a powerful stimulant drug its use might be dangerous for those with any kind of heart condition or history of major psychiatric disorder.

Amphetamines and pregnancy

Amphetamines can cause weight loss, which may stop the menstrual period and the production of eggs. Use during pregnancy can also lead to malnutrition of mother and baby.

Dependence and Tolerance

Dependence

There is no conclusive evidence of physical dependence. There is, however, psychological dependence, as amphetamine use seems to offer temporary relief and add a new dimension to life. It becomes a regular emotional need for the user, essential to the daily routine. This is known as psychological dependence.

Tolerance

The body quickly becomes used to the presence of amphetamine. This means that increasingly larger doses are needed in order to achieve the same effect. The danger is that the more that someone uses, the more they want and the greater the risk to both body and mind.

The Law

Amphetamines are a Class A drug when prepared for injection and are Class B in all other forms. Both are Schedule 2.

Methylamphetamine (Crystal meth)

Methylamphetamine is a type of amphetamine (as mentioned above). The drug is cheap and easy to manufacture.

Street Names

Street names include Crystal Meth, yaba, zip, meth, speed, go-fast, cristy, crystal, tina, chalk, crank, shabu, glass, crazy medicine, ice

Appearance

Methylamphetamine takes the form of a white odourless and bitter-tasting crystalline powder, readily soluble in water or alcohol. In its heavily concentrated crystal form (crystal meth or ice) it is usually white or clear, but can be yellow or green. It can appear waxy. It can also come as a tablet.

How it is taken

Methylamphetamine can be smoked, injected intravenously, snorted or digested orally.

Effects

It has similar effects to amphetamine, but is four times stronger. If smoked can give an intense high like crack, but lasting for up to eight hours, unlike crack, which lasts ten minutes. It can lead to 2 to 36 hours of stimulation, excitement, talkativeness, stamina, feelings of well-being, confidence and alertness. It also reduces appetite and inhibitions and increases the sex-drive.

Risks

There is an immediate risk of heart attack and stroke. Other possibilities include nervousness, anxiety, depression, paranoia, psychosis, moodiness, aggression, disturbed sleep, impaired speech, weight loss and lowered immunity. The high may be too much for many people, and it is followed by a big crash when feelings of hopelessness and sadness are common. This comedown can last between 8 and 16 hours, or as long as a week with chronic usage. The crash may lead people to either re-use the drug, or to take other drugs to lessen the effects, such as heroin and benzodiazepines. Long-term users may also develop scabs from constant scratching, as well as damage to their teeth from constant jaw grinding. There is an increased risk of sexually transmitted infections as users are more likely to engage in unprotected sexual activities.

Tolerance and Addiction

Users develop a tolerance and need to use more of the drug to get the required effects. Methamphetamine is addictive both physically and psychologically.

The Law

It is a class A drug

Amphetamines Statistics

Last updated December 2020

Use of Amphetamines

0.3% of people aged 16-59 said they had used amphetamines in the last year. This number has halved in 12 months, from 0.6%. In the 2010/11 survey, 1.0% of adults said they had used them in the last year so there has been a drop in use.

0.6% of young people aged 16-24 reported using amphetamines in the last year. In 2010/11, it was 2.4% so again, there has been a reduction in this age group too.

(ONS Drug Misuse for England and Wales, 2019/20; British Crime Survey, 2010/11)

Use of Methamphetamine

0.1% of young people aged 16-24 reported using methamphetamine in the last year. In 2010/11, the survey indicated that 0.1% of people in this age group said they had used methamphetamine. So, there has been no change in young people using it.

No one in the 16-59 age group has reported using this drug to this survey in the last year. In 2010/11, 0.1% of people in this age group said they had used it.

(ONS Drug Misuse for England and Wales, 2019/20; British Crime Survey, 2010/11)

In the past few years, the manufacture and use of methamphetamine have emerged in the Near and Middle East/South-West Asia, subregions that until recently were dominated by use of "captagon" (amphetamine). Methamphetamine manufacture and consumption used to be largely unknown in those subregions. Initially reported by only one country in the sub-region (Israel), the number of countries reporting seizures of methamphetamine has increased in subsequent years. Overall, eight countries in the Near and Middle East/South-West Asia reported seizures of methamphetamine in the period 2000–2009, rising to 14 countries in the period 2010–2018. The bulk of the methamphetamine seized, however, continued to be seized by the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Also, while the non-medical use of pharmaceutical stimulants is more prevalent in North America, a significant number of people also use methamphetamine.
(World Drug Report, 2020)