

Amphetamines and your mental health

What are amphetamines?

Amphetamines are stimulants. They speed up the messages going to and from the brain to the body, but tend to leave you feeling tired and depressed when they wear off.

Other names for amphetamines

Speed, up, fast, pep pills, louie, go.

Crystal methamphetamine is called ice or shabu, and is a more potent type of amphetamine that tends to lead to greater problems.

How do amphetamines affect you?

Amphetamines affect people differently and may cause more problems for some people than others, especially if they have a history of mental illness.

Amphetamines can have the following common effects:

- Make you feel more confident, energetic and wide-awake
- Reduce your appetite
- Make you anxious, restless and irritable
- Make you suspicious or paranoid
- Increase your breathing and pulse and increase the risk of panic attacks
- Increase feelings of anger and risk of violent behaviour.

Amphetamines and your mental health

If you have a mental illness, your symptoms may increase. Using amphetamines may lead to or worsen depression and symptoms such as agitation, mood swings and anxiety.

Amphetamines can *significantly* increase paranoia – for example, believing you are being followed, stared at or talked about. Paranoia can be distressing and increases your risk of doing things you normally would not do.

Amphetamines can cause drug-induced psychosis, where you believe strange things (delusions) or see or hear things that are not there (hallucinations), even when the drug has worn off.

Amphetamines can cause brain damage if you overdose or take too much at once.

Taking amphetamines over a long period of time can damage the brain cells and affect the way they work.

What happens when you stop using amphetamines?

If you have been using amphetamines regularly, you will probably experience withdrawal symptoms when you stop.

Withdrawal symptoms can include:

- Irritability
- Depression, anxiety or mood swings
- Cravings
- Fatigue
- Disturbed sleep
- Headaches
- Increased appetite
- Poor concentration
- Paranoia
- Hallucinations.

These symptoms tend to decrease after a week, although some may still occur for up to three months.

Amphetamines and other drugs

Mixing amphetamines with alcohol or other drugs is dangerous, and can cause unpredictable effects.

Using depressants such as benzodiazepines (such as Valium) or alcohol to "come down" or sleep can lead to a cycle of polydrug dependence that can have a very negative impact on your mental and physical health.

Amphetamines can also interfere with the effectiveness of some medication. Tell your doctor about your use.

Reducing harm from amphetamines

- Have amphetamine-free days.
- Avoid mixing with alcohol or other drugs such as benzodiazepines and heroin.
- Eat healthy food, even if you aren't hungry.
- If injecting, always use new fits and do not share any injecting equipment, including spoons, water or tourniquets.
- If you are going to use amphetamines, try not to inject - drink in water, snort or "gum" them (rub into your gums).
- Only buy from someone you know.
- Never buy "on credit".
- Use in a safe place with people you trust.

What to do if your friend passes out?

If the person is unconscious, check their airway is clear, turn them on their side and into the recovery position.

Call an ambulance on 000 and stay with them.

If breathing has stopped, give mouth to mouth resuscitation. If there is no pulse, start applying CPR if you are trained.

Amphetamines and pregnancy

Amphetamines can affect the baby's development before birth. Other effects can be bleeding, early labor and miscarriage.

Amphetamine use and the law

It is illegal to possess, use, supply or manufacture amphetamines in Australia. Penalties range from \$2000 fine and/or imprisonment.

Useful phone numbers

Emergency	000
Direct line	1800 888 236
Drug Info	1300 858 584
Moreland Hall (Northern Region)	9386 2876
DAS West (Western Region)	8345 6682
Voyage (Western Region)	9296 1228
Hepatitis C Helpline	9349 1111
Suicide helpline	1300 651 251
Smoking Quitline	13 18 48
Family Drug Help	1300 660 068

Conclusion

Amphetamines can significantly worsen symptoms associated with mental illness.

SUMITT is a Victorian dual diagnosis service, providing direct clinical care, consultation and training on co-occurring substance use and mental illness.

3-7 Eleanor St Footscray VIC 3011

(03) 8345-6682