

WHAT'S SPEED GOT TO DO WITH IT ?



IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR PEOPLE WITH MENTAL OR EMOTIONAL PROBLEMS

Speed, stims, goee: the drugs that hype you up and give you a rush. They include Amphetamines and Cocaine and are called psychostimulants because they speed up messages going through your nervous system. They can reduce tiredness, increase endurance and help you stay awake.

Amphetamines usually come as a smelly white, yellow or brown powder, but you can also find it as tablets, capsules, crystals or red liquid. It can be smoked, swallowed, inhaled through the nose ('snorted') or dissolved in a small amount of water and injected.

Because they don't have many medical uses, most amphetamines are crudely made in backyard laboratories, often mixed with other substances, which means they can have very unpredictable effects

STIMULANTS AND MENTAL HEALTH

People who have emotional or psychiatric problems are worse off if they use speed. While amphetamines can make someone feel full of energy and confidence, in a person with a mental illness it is more likely to set off a major breakdown..

Speed is one of the few drugs that can actually cause mental illness. Some drugs can trigger a hidden illness, but *anyone* who takes speed long enough or in large amounts can be going to become mentally ill. Even small doses cause people to experience the symptoms of manic-depressive illness (MDP), so people who already have schizophrenia, MDP or bipolar disorder should definitely avoid using speed. Other illnesses, including Obsessive Compulsive

Disorder (OCD) and Post traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) can also be made worse by speed.

DEPRESSION AND SPEED

All the good effects that go with using speed have a down side. Feeling full of energy and self-confidence easily becomes out-of-control, hyperactive behaviour. speed is often linked with aggression and violence.

It is very common to become depressed after using speed, or even suicidal. This is part of the withdrawal effect and while it normally wears off in a few days or weeks, that's not always the case. There is a special kind of depression caused by speed and cocaine which can last for months.

Uppers make people feel good by flooding the brain with a chemical called **serotonin**. Ecstasy releases even more serotonin than speed. It makes many people feel open and warm towards each other. But regular use damages your brain's ability to handle serotonin, and the long periods of depression that follow can last for ages, even needing psychiatric treatment to help the sufferer cope. It takes many months without speed before this condition starts to get better, and for some people, it never does.

ECSTASY (MDMA)

Methylenedioxymethamphetamine or 'ecstasy' is an unusual stimulant, because it also acts like

a hallucinogenic (hallucinogenics are drugs like LSD or trips).

The immediate effects of ecstasy include:

- A feeling of tranquillity
- increased confidence
- raised blood pressure
- increased heart rate
- feeling close to other people
- jaw clenching, grinding teeth
- dry mouth and throat
- nausea and loss of appetite
- anxiety and paranoia

larger doses cause:

- sweating
- hallucinations
- irrational behaviour
- convulsions
- vomiting

The next day a severe hangover may leave you feeling 'burned out'.

Symptoms include: loss of appetite; insomnia; depression; aching muscles and difficulty in concentrating.

Too much results in very high blood pressure, body temperature and racing heartbeat which can lead to heart failure and stroke.

SCHIZOPHRENIA AND SPEED

All the symptoms of schizophrenia can be caused by stims: delusions, paranoid thoughts and feelings, hallucinations and badly scrambled thinking. The illness (called a drug induced psychosis) is treated like schizophrenia, usually in a psychiatric ward, and takes a few weeks to bring under control. Once a person has had one drug induced psychosis, they are very likely to have more episodes, and a small number of people will continue to experience

Most amphetamines are produced in backyard laboratories and sold illegally. They are crudely made and often mixed with other substances, which means they can have very unpredictable effects

Anyone who takes enough speed, or who uses regularly for long enough, risks developing all the symptoms of schizophrenia.

these symptoms even if they stop using stimulants altogether.

For people who have schizophrenia, or who have a relative with the illness, speed is a very risky drug to use. It will make the illness worse and prevent medication working properly.

The earlier schizophrenia starts, the harder it can be to treat, and speed is frequently the trigger for the first episode of the illness.

BIPOLAR DISORDER AND SPEED

Speed does more than mimic mania; it triggers manic episodes in people who have a bipolar disorder. In the same way, the "crash" that follows speed use can result in a severe depressive episode in someone who has a bipolar disorder, leading to suicide attempts or hospitalisation. The effect is even worse with cocaine.

DEPRESSION AND SPEED

If you are depressed it seems logical to take a drug like speed that makes you feel happy, high and confident. But there is a catch: two catches, really. The first is that what is true for bipolar illness is also true for depression. When you come off, you are likely to be far more depressed than when you took it. The other catch is that taking speed or cocaine over a long period "burns out" certain parts of the brain (serotonin receptors), leading to chronic depression which does not respond well to treatment with medication

IS SPEED ADDICTIVE?

Speed users find that they need increasingly larger doses to get the effect they are looking for from the drug. This increasing "tolerance" is an indication of physical addiction. More importantly, stimulant use can come to have such an important place in a users life that it interferes

with relationships, education, work, friendships and family life. Health is often neglected and people do some very risky things to ensure their supply is not interfered with.

IS SPEED A DANGEROUS DRUG?

Speed is currently the second most widely used injecting drug in Australia. More people are in rehab programs for stimulant abuse than for any other illegal drug, and many people are in jail because of using and supplying it to other people.

Because of the way it is manufactured, people who use speed have a very high incidence of HIV/AIDS, hepatitis and other blood

borne diseases. Using speed is also associated with violent, out-of-control behaviour. You might injure someone else, or you could be the victim!

There is also the risk of becoming psychotic, perhaps permanently mentally ill. And then there is the risk of jail...

SPEED AND OTHER DRUGS

Speed & Marijuana ~

Marijuana starves your body of oxygen and increases the amount of poisonous carbon monoxide in your bloodstream. Speed pumps up your heart and makes sure this poison gets to your brain and to all the organs of your body. That's not good. Marijuana will also make many people paranoid at times, and that increases the chance of having a schizophrenic illness when you use stimulants. They shouldn't be used together, or even within a few days of each other, because the active part of marijuana stays in your system for a very long time after you take it.

Speed & Alcohol ~

Speed increases your heart rate to 120 beats per minute or more. At the same time, it increases your blood pressure. and makes the heart beat irregular and erratic. Add alcohol, which also interferes with circulation and blood pressure and the combination is pretty dangerous.

Depressants and stimulants work on different parts of the brain, giving your body conflicting signals which disrupt many functions. Especially, alcohol can slow your breathing reflex which results in less oxygen at the time **your** racing, irregular pulse is demanding extra. It can be a fatal combination.

Speed and Medication ~

Some HIV/AIDS drugs can lead to liver damage if taken with speed. Medications for mental illness won't work properly if you are on speed, but the side effects will actually get worse, and antidepressants are ineffective while you are taking speed. The combination of speed and antidepressants increases the risk of having an amphetamine psychosis. Some drugs, like anticoagulants (for stroke and heart disease) can become fatal if used with speed.

OTHER ISSUES

Users often take other drugs to counter effects like insomnia, leading to polydrug dependence. Stimulants are appetite suppressants, and loss of weight, poor nutrition and neglect go along with using. So does becoming vulnerable to infection and disease.

Users often take other drugs to counter effects like insomnia, leading to polydrug dependence.

This client information leaflet was designed and written by the Midas Dual Disorder Service, South Western Sydney Area Health Service. It may be freely copied and distributed provided this notice and the SWSAHS Logo remain part of the document.



David Rich Clinical Nurse Consultant