

What are amphetamines?

Amphetamines are a group of highly addictive drugs that stimulate the central nervous system. They come in liquid, powder, paste, pill or crystal forms. There are legal and illegal forms of amphetamines. The type of illegal amphetamine that is typically found in South Australia is methamphetamine, which is smoked, swallowed, snorted through the nose or injected. Legal amphetamines, such as dextroamphetamine and lisdexamfetamine, are usually only prescribed for particular disorders such as narcolepsy (sleep disorder) or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

Effects

During use

The effects felt during use can be both desired and undesired. For most people who use amphetamines, the desired effects are feelings of wellbeing, and increased confidence, energy, stamina, concentration and sex drive. People who use amphetamines often experience heightened alertness, self-awareness and visual awareness. Use often causes excitability, hyperactivity, wanting to talk a lot and a loss of interest in sleep.

- > repetitive movements
- > loss of coordination
- > tremors
- > high blood pressure
- > irregular heartbeat
- > headache, blurred vision and dizziness
- > nausea and vomiting, stomach cramps
- > aggression
- > anxiety
- > unpredictable behaviour.

Harmful effects

Harmful effects can be fatal, usually due to stress on the heart.

Use of even a small amount of amphetamine can cause:

- > dry mouth
- > suppressed appetite
- > increased heart rate, blood pressure, breathing, pupil size
- > irritability
- > restlessness.

Injecting and smoking amphetamines can increase the risk of psychosis and dependence.

Overdose - what to look out for

Someone has experienced an overdose if they suffer a medical emergency as a result of accidentally or intentionally using a larger amount of a drug than normal. Noticeable signs you or someone else is having an overdose can include:

- > seizures
- > chest pain
- > high temperature (fever and sweating)
- > extreme anxiety
- > hallucinations (seeing, hearing or feeling things that don't exist)
- > paranoid thoughts (irrational distrust)

If someone is experiencing any of the above signs, **phone 000** immediately for medical attention. Police will not attend unless the ambulance officers call for help or a death occurs.

Effects of long-term use

People who use amphetamines on a regular basis can experience the following physical and psychological effects:

- > malnutrition due to reduced hunger
- > mood swings and depression
- > psychosis - hearing voices, imagining things, hallucinations and delusions (false beliefs)
- > itchy sores on the skin
- > changes to brain function, which may be permanent
- > less resistance to infections
- > sleep problems due to loss of interest in sleep.

People who use regularly can also experience a range of other social, legal, financial and emotional problems.

Duration

The method used to take amphetamines determines how quickly the effects are felt – less than a minute for injecting, smoking or snorting and about 30 minutes for swallowing. Effects can last for four to six hours.

Dependence

Using daily, or almost every day, over a period of time leads to physical and psychological changes to the body.

The body adapts or 'gets used to' having a drug on a regular basis. This is the basis of tolerance. People who are tolerant need more of the drug to achieve the same effects, but increasing the dose also increases the likelihood of unpleasant effects.

The key feature of dependence is a loss of control over use. People who are dependent spend a lot of time thinking about drugs, obtaining and using drugs, and recovering from the effects. They find it difficult to reduce or stop drug use, even when they are aware of problems related to their drug use.

Withdrawal

Withdrawal occurs when someone who is dependent on amphetamine stops using it or tries to cut down.

Common symptoms are:

- > depression (inactivity, fatigue, altered mood)
- > increased sleep, but of poor quality
- > unpleasant dreams
- > increased appetite
- > anxiety, agitation, irritability, poor concentration and paranoia
- > craving amphetamines.

Symptoms can be intense for the first 10 days and gradually reduce over the next few weeks. Some people report that craving and mood disturbance can linger.

Reducing the risk

It is always safer not to use drugs, but there are ways to reduce the risk.

- > It is safer not to inject because of the risk of infections and blood borne virus transmission such as hepatitis C, hepatitis B and HIV. Injecting and smoking amphetamines also increases the risk of psychosis and dependence.
- > If injecting, always use clean injecting equipment and dispose of it safely. There are Clean Needle Programs throughout South Australia where sterile injecting equipment, health information and referrals can be accessed for free.
- > Visit www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/dassa for more information.
- > Using smaller amounts less often reduces the risk of developing dependence. Avoid regular use.
- > Avoid mixing with other drugs.
- > Don't use alone.

Amphetamines and the law

It is illegal to make, keep, sell or give away amphetamines. It is also illegal to use amphetamines except when you have been prescribed them for a recognised medical condition.

Under the section 47 of the *Road Traffic Act 1961*, it is an offence to drive or attempt to drive a motor vehicle under the influence of a drug. Drugs in your system make driving extremely dangerous because they impair coordination, reduce reaction time, and affect your vision and ability to judge distance and speed.

For more information about amphetamines and the law, visit the SA Health website www.sahealth.sa.gov.au > Health topics > Legal matters > Illicit drug laws.

Further information

Methamphetamine - visit www.sahealth.sa.gov.au > Health topics > M > Methamphetamine.

Risks of using drugs - visit www.sahealth.sa.gov.au > Healthy Living > Is your health at risk? > The risks of using drugs.

Phone the Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS) on 1300 13 1340 between 8.30am and 10pm for confidential telephone counselling, information and referral.

For more information

Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS)

Phone: 1300 13 1340

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www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/dassa

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