

# 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 may often experience heightened alertness, self-awareness and visual awareness. Amphetamine use can cause excitability, hyperactivity, wanting to talk a lot and a loss of interest in sleep.

### Harmful effects

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

Even a small amount of THC can cause:

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

### Overdose/Toxicity – 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 (or stronger) 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)
- > 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.

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.

### Reducing the risk

While avoiding drug use is the safest option, there are ways to reduce the harm.

- > 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 new injecting equipment and dispose of it safely. There are Needle and Syringe Programs throughout South Australia where new injecting equipment, health information and referrals can be accessed for free.
- > Visit [www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/nsp](http://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/nsp) 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.

*Illicit drugs have no quality control and may contain unexpected substances.  
If you use illicit drugs, ensure you have some naloxone on hand (a drug which reverses opioid overdose).  
Naloxone only works against opioids (e.g. NITAZENES, heroin, fentanyl, methadone).  
Naloxone will not harm the person if the overdose turns out not to be opioid related.*

The **Take-Home Naloxone** program provides free naloxone from participating pharmacies and needle and syringe programs. You can find participating locations at [www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/THN](http://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/THN) or call the Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS) on 1300 13 1340.

### Effects of long-term use

People who use amphetamines on a frequent 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 frequently can also experience a range of other social, legal, financial and emotional problems.

### Duration

The way amphetamines are taken affects how quickly their effects begin. When injected, smoked or snorted, the effects are felt within a minute, whereas swallowing takes approximately 30 minutes. The effects typically last between four and 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 have a tolerance 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.

## 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](http://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au) > Health topics > Legal matters > Illicit drug laws.

## Further information

Contact the [Alcohol and Drug information Service \(ADIS\)](#) — [1300 13 1340](tel:1300131340)

Know Your Options — [knowyouroptions.sa.gov.au](http://knowyouroptions.sa.gov.au) for information on where to get help.

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## For more information

### Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS)

Phone: 1300 13 1340

Confidential telephone counselling and information available between 8.30am and 10pm every day



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