

AMPHETAMINES

What is amphetamine?

The term 'amphetamine' refers to a whole family of synthetic drugs that are all chemically related to amphetamine and all have pretty similar effects. The amphetamine family of drugs fall into the class of drugs known as stimulants. Stimulants increase the activity of the central nervous system and produce effects similar to the body's naturally occurring hormone, adrenalin. Amphetamine was originally synthesised for medical purposes and was first used in the 1920s as a decongestant and to treat obesity and depression. During World War II and the Korean and Vietnam Wars, soldiers on all sides of the conflicts were given amphetamine to keep them awake, to give them more energy and to suppress their appetites.

Currently in Australia amphetamine comes in many different forms and users refer to it with many different names, including speed, goey, crystal, crystal meth, base, pure, ice, shabu and ox blood. Some people think that ice and shabu are totally new drugs, but they're not - they're just strong and more potent forms of amphetamine that come in the form of a crystal rather than a powder. (See the Ice Fact Sheet to find out more about this form of amphetamine.)

No matter what form it comes in, almost all the speed available in Australia today is methamphetamine. Methamphetamine is slightly different in chemical terms to amphetamine, but the two have very similar effects. Although the availability and use of crystalline forms of methamphetamine are increasing, most of the speed available in Australia these days still comes in the form of powder. Speed powder can vary in texture from very fine to more coarse and crystalline, and can also vary in colour from white to yellow, pink or brownish. All these variations occur because the purifying process involved in the manufacture of amphetamine is quite tricky and most of the people who make the drug don't have the chemical expertise to do it properly. This means that, although they're all making speed, they end up with a wide range of products at the end of the manufacturing process which look different and contain different impurities.

Tablets that are prescribed for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), such as dexamphetamine, Duromine and Ritalin are occasionally used by speed users for their stimulant properties.

Most Australians who use speed powder either snort or swallow it, although some people choose to inject it. Some of the people who use the crystalline forms known as ice or shabu smoke it in a special glass pipe. Injecting and smoking are the more harmful ways to use speed.

How many people use amphetamine?

According to the 2001 National Drug Household Survey, 9% of the Australian population reported using amphetamine at some time, with 3% having used it in the last 12 months.

The average age at first use was 20.4 years.

The 1999 Secondary School Survey showed that 8% of 12-17 year old males and 7% of females attending high school across Australia ever reporting using amphetamine.

- 13% of 17 year old males reported ever using amphetamine
- 11% of 17 year old females reported ever using amphetamine
- 4% of 12 year old males reported ever using amphetamine
- 2% of 12 year old females reported ever using amphetamine

Other names for amphetamine

Amphetamine is also known as speed, go-ee, whiz, uppers, dexies, buzz, rev, crystal, meth, crystal meth, base, pure, ice, shabu ox blood and ice.

What are the short-term effects of amphetamine?

The short-term effects of using amphetamine may include:

- **euphoria and well-being**
- **increased energy and hyperactivity**
- **talkativeness**
- **reduction of appetite**
- **dry mouth**
- **increased blood pressure and heart rate**
- **nausea**

What are the long-term effects of amphetamine?

The long-term effects of using amphetamine may include:

- **sleep problems**
- **extreme mood swings**
- **compulsive repetition of actions**
- **paranoia**
- **depression and anxiety**
- **panic attacks**
- **seizures**
- **social and financial problems**

One of the greatest problems experienced by amphetamine users is amphetamine-induced psychosis or 'speed psychosis'. The symptoms of speed psychosis are similar to those of paranoid schizophrenia, and may include:

- **hallucinations**
- **paranoid delusions**
- **uncontrolled violent behaviour**

This state usually disappears after the drug has been eliminated from the body, although the user remains vulnerable to further episodes. If the drug is used again, the psychosis may recur.