

Fact Sheet

Amphetamines

AKA: Amphetamine Sulphate, *speed, wizz, sulph, billy, phet, pink champagne*. Base Amphetamine: *base, base speed* Dexedrine, *dexies, dex* Methamphetamine Sulphate, *Crystal Meth, meth, ice, shad, glass, Tina, Shabu, Yabba, crank* Methylphenidate "Ritalin"

The amphetamine "family" contains a number of prescribed and non-prescribed stimulant compounds. Methylphenidate is related to amphetamines (though not strictly an amphetamine).

SOURCE: Most Amphetamines available on the street are illegally produced in laboratories. However, Dexamphetamine Sulphate is still available on prescription and so leaks onto the streets from legitimate sources though is increasingly rare. Ritalin is prescribed to children with ADHD and some of this is diverted to illicit use.

APPEARANCE: The main form of amphetamine sold in the UK has up until recently, been Amphetamine Sulphate powder. Colour ranges from white, off-white, grey, yellow, and pink. It is usually sold by weight, in small rectangular wraps of paper. It is a sour-tasting, water soluble powder.

Increasingly commonly available is base-speed, a grey paste similar in consistency to putty. It is a non-soluble base drug often smelling strongly of ammonia.

Dexedrine tablets are usually circular and are white or yellow. Methylphenidate (Ritalin) comes as scored tablets.

Methamphetamine comes in the form of white powder or clear crystals, but is also sold in tablet form.

COSTS: Speed is usually sold by weight, at a cost of around £5 per gram. Base is more expensive, typically £20-30 a gram. Prices for Methamphetamine in the UK are the source of much speculation but allegedly range from £35-75 a gram.

QUALITY: Speed sold on the streets is usually of very poor quality, and is usually between 5% and 10% pure. Base-speed is far stronger, between 50% and 70% pure. Some so-called 'base' is low grade amphetamine powder mixed with oil and or similar to give it a base-like consistency.

METHODS OF USE: Amphetamines in powder form can be swallowed, snorted, dabbed onto the gums, or injected. Methamphetamine is usually smoked, though it can be injected.

Base speed is non-soluble making it useless for snorting and dangerous to inject. It is usually swallowed or can be smoked.

EFFECTS: Amphetamines are stimulant drugs that work on the central nervous system. They start working within fifteen minutes (faster if injected or smoked.)

They cause an increase in heart rate and blood pressure. They make the user feel more alert, confident and give a sense of increased energy. They reduce the desire for sleep and suppress the appetite. They can cause tension in the muscles, and cause tightness of the jaw, which leads some people to grind their teeth and chew constantly. Users tend to talk a lot, and pupils may become dilated.

Other less popular effects are anxiety, paranoia, irritability. Amphetamines elevate levels of dopamine and adrenalin. This causes intense euphoria and feelings of well being, but also puts significant strain on the cardiovascular system.

Methamphetamine is also associated with elevating sexual arousal and can lead to long bouts of unsafe sexual behaviour.

Depending on the drug and route, the duration of effect varies massively. This could range from an hour or two for injected amphetamines, to over twelve hours for methamphetamine.

HEALTH IMPLICATIONS: Amphetamine use does not provide the body with any extra energy nor does it remove the need for sleep. It simply allows the body to access existing reserves of energy faster, and prevents, rather than removes, the need for sleep.

There is an inevitable comedown after the amphetamines have worn off - tiredness, depression, loss of self-esteem, hunger, and achiness. There may be a temptation to alleviate some of these symptoms by using some painkilling or tranquillising drug, or alternatively using more speed. Neither option is ultimately beneficial, and it would be better to allow the body to recover naturally, through eating and sleeping to recuperate lost energy.

Use of amphetamines can cause weight loss, which, if extensive, could be dangerous and damaging. Historically Dexamphetamine was prescribed as an aid to slimming though this practice is now seriously frowned upon.

Amphetamines are usually "cut" with other substances to increase the profit when sold; these adulterants can cause damage and illness, especially when they are toxic substances. Regular snorting of amphetamines can cause damage to the nasal passages; rubbing speed onto the gums can cause gum and tooth damage. Swallowing amphetamines can cause stomach irritation and nausea. Injecting speed carries all the risks attached to intravenous drug use.

Smoking methamphetamine is associated with damage to teeth and gums, leading to a dental syndrome dubbed "meth mouth."

Methamphetamine is also thought to affect the Immune System and amongst people with HIV may accelerate the deterioration of health.

Psychologically, regular and frequent speed use can cause a condition called Amphetamine Psychosis, typified by intense paranoia and anxiety. While the condition usually abates after the amphetamine use is discontinued, medical assistance may be helpful.

Deaths do occur, and risks of death are exacerbated amongst people who have heart conditions.

Amphetamines are not physically addictive, but there is a significant risk of psychological dependency, especially amongst frequent regular users. The compulsion to use Methamphetamine appears to be especially strong.

LEGAL STATUS: Most amphetamines are Class B, Schedule 2 drugs. This means that, unless produced, supplied or possessed under Home Office licence, offences would be committed under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. Amphetamines, like other class B drugs, are counted as Class A drugs when prepared for injection. Pharmaceuticals such as Dexamphetamine Sulphate are legal if prescribed and used by the person to whom they were prescribed. A small number of weaker amphetamine-based (e.g. Benzphetamine) are Class C drugs. Methamphetamine was made a Class A drug on 2007.

OTHER INFORMATION: Despite their poor quality, amphetamines are widely used in the UK. Much of this use is club-related, with people taking speed to dance or party all night. It is also used by anyone needing to stay up for long periods - students revising, long distance lorry-drivers, security guards and so on. While it can improve concentration on repetitive tasks, it tends not to make people more creative or imaginative.

Amphetamine use can make people more aggressive. It may inhibit erection in male users, but this does not appear to be true for methamphetamine.

Amphetamines do not mix well with alcohol. They can give the illusion of sobriety, and prevent the full effects of the alcohol becoming apparent until the speed has worn off. People can drink dangerous amounts, only realising that they have done so when the speed has gone.

Police and drugs professionals have become increasingly concerned about the growth of Methamphetamine. This has become a widely used drug in the USA, Australia and a number of Asian countries. It is relatively easy to make, and has a long period of effect. This means that it brings with it greater physical and mental health risks than other amphetamines. As yet, its use in the UK is not very widespread though there is fear that this situation could change.