WHAT IS SPEED?

‘Speed’ is the name given to a number of street drugs that are chemically related to amphetamine. Speed refers to a group of stimulant drugs known as amphetamines. Amphetamines stimulate, or speed up, the major central nervous system and are sometimes described as psycho-stimulants or stimulants, with similar properties to cocaine.

Amphetamine does not occur naturally, it is a synthetic chemical. Most is produced in backyard laboratories. Chemical names of amphetamines most commonly used in Australia are amphetamine, dexamphetamine and methamphetamine.

Amphetamines are taken by mouth, by snorting the powder, or by intravenous injection of powder dissolved in water (the riskiest method). Speed is also sometimes sprinkled on top of marijuana and smoked – ‘snow-cones’. The crystal form of methamphetamine – ‘ice’, ‘crystal’, etc. – is sometimes smoked in a glass pipe.

IMMEDIATE EFFECTS

Like all mind-altering drugs, speed affects brain chemicals, or neurotransmitters, initially leading to increased physical energy and mental alertness. The effect is similar to that produced by adrenalin. Breathing and heart rate increase, the mouth becomes dry, and pupils enlarge.

High doses can cause tremor, anxiety, headache and palpitations with chest pain. Very high doses can cause delirium, hallucinations, delusion and coma.

When the effects of speed wear off, the neurotransmitters are drained (particularly adrenalin), causing the user to feel tired, depressed and irritable. Frequent use can lead to a total depletion of neurotransmitters, which may take months to recover.

After large doses or injection, users experience overwhelming euphoria followed...
by devastating depression, exhaustion and confusion. Other negative after-effects include constipation and trouble sleeping.

**VIOLANCE**

Many users become emotionally unstable and prone to unpredictable violence, aggression and paranoia.

**BRAIN DAMAGE**

Research has shown that large amounts of speed can kill rat brain cells, and the same thing might happen in heavy speed users. The by-products contained in speed can also be damaging to the brain.

Taking too much speed at once can injure the brain, because of high body temperature.

Speed can also affect the way brain cells work, including ability to concentrate and mood.

**HEART PROBLEMS & STROKE**

Heart failure and rupture of brain, heart and lung blood vessels can be a side-effect of chronic speed use.

High blood pressure is another side effect. Speed can cause strokes because of the pressure it puts on the heart and veins. This could lead to paralysis or even death.

**IMMUNITY**

Use of speed may damage the immune system, increasing the risk of infections. In addition, because regular users often don’t sleep or eat properly, they are more prone to infections.

**POOR APPETITE**

Loss of appetite and irregular eating patterns associated with use of speed.
amphetamines may result in weight loss, malnutrition and vitamin deficiencies.  

SPEED PSYCHOSIS

Speed psychosis is a temporary condition caused by using a lot of speed. The main symptom is paranoia. This and other symptoms like hallucinations usually go away after a period of time. People who continue to use become increasingly paranoid, scared and aggressive.

PREGNANCY

Women who take amphetamines during pregnancy have a greater risk of giving birth prematurely, and giving birth to babies with low birth weight. If it is used early in pregnancy, the risk of the baby being born with a deformity is increased. Amphetamine use also increases the risk of miscarriage.

OVERDOSE

People can overdose on speed, often resulting in headaches, chest pains, fast breathing and pounding heart, paranoia, agitation, anxiety, panic, shakiness, sweats. Death can result from speed overdose, but is unlikely.

ADDICTION

Speed can be just as addictive as drugs such as heroin and alcohol. Regular users develop tolerance to speed, so that they have to use more to get the same effect.

WITHDRAWAL

Extreme depression and suicide attempts may accompany withdrawal, so treatment needs to be carefully supervised.

HEALTH PROBLEMS ARE NOT THE ONLY RISKS!

All the usual drug-related issues – such as problems with relationships, work and study, finances and legal issues – are also associated with use of speed.
Endnotes


2 Topp, McKetin, Hando, Dillon, loc.cit.

3 Topp, McKetin, Hando, Dillon, op.cit. p.9


5 Topp, McKetin, Hando, Dillon, op.cit. p.20-21


7 Moffitt, Malouf, Thompson, loc.cit.

8 Topp, McKetin, Hando, Dillon, op.cit., p.21

9 Scott & Grice, op.cit., p.71

10 Scott & Grice, loc.cit.

11 Topp, McKetin, Hando, Dillon, op.cit., p.21

12 Moffitt, Malouf, Thompson, op.cit., p.34


14 Moffit, Malouf, Thompson, op.cit., p.34

15 Topp, McKetin, Hando, Dillon, op.cit., p.19

16 Moffitt, Malouf, Thompson, op.cit., p.35

17 Topp, McKetin, Hando, Dillon, op.cit., p.18

18 Topp, McKetin, Hando, Dillon, op.cit., p.14

19 Topp, McKetin, Hando, Dillon, op.cit.p.17