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# CHEMICAL · DRUG · PESTICIDE

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## "Questions About Stimulants"

from

A Federal Source Book:

### Answers to the Most Frequently Asked Questions About Drug Abuse

#### WHAT IS A STIMULANT?

Stimulants are drugs, usually amphetamines, which increase alertness, reduce hunger and provide a feeling of well being. Their medical uses include the suppression of appetite and the reduction of fatigue or mild depression.

Many stimulants are known, including: cocaine, amphetamine (Benzadrine "bennies"), dextroamphetamine (Dexedrine "dexies") and methamphetamine (Methedrine). The latter is commonly called "speed" or "crystal." Stimulants are also known as "uppers" or "pep pills."

#### HOW DO AMPHETAMINES WORK?

According to current research findings, amphetamines increase the availability of noradrenaline at the nerve cell connections. This is particularly true in areas of the brain associated with vigilance, heart action, and mood. Excessive stimulation of these brain cells is normal under emergency life conditions, but when it is prolonged by amphetamines, undesirable secondary changes develop.

#### HOW ARE STIMULANTS TAKEN?

Usually stimulants are taken by mouth in the form of capsules or tablets. Crystal methamphetamine and cocaine can be inhaled or "snorted" through the nose. They can also be injected into veins, in which case the effects are immediate and more intense.

#### HOW MANY PEOPLE ARE ABUSING AMPHETAMINES?

The exact number of amphetamine abusers is unknown, but the abuse of very large quantities of amphetamines is increasing. The drug-using subcultures, such as Haight-Ashbury in San Francisco, are now essentially "speed" subcultures. The abuse of amphetamines in weight-reducing pills is also on the rise. Approximately 10 billion amphetamine pills are legitimately manufactured every year, and a large amount of these will be diverted into illegal channels. Many illicit laboratories that manufacture stimulants have been discovered and seized.

#### WHAT ARE THE VARIOUS TYPES OF STIMULANT ABUSE?

There is the occasional user who takes the drug to exert himself beyond his physiological limits. He may want to stay awake to drive, excel in an athletic

contest, or cram for an examination. This type of abuse rarely leads to difficulties, but it may. Instances of death during athletic contests have been traced to amphetamine use.

A second type of abuse is taking 75-100 mg. per day (the average dose is 15-30 mg.) for long periods of time. These individuals are drug-dependent.

A relatively new type of abuse involves the injection of massive doses intravenously once or a dozen times a day. This produces practically the same effects as cocaine. These users are referred to as "speed freaks."

#### WHAT EFFECTS DO AMPHETAMINES HAVE?

In ordinary amounts the amphetamines provide a transient sense of alertness and well being. Hunger is diminished, and short-term performance may be enhanced in the fatigued person.

When amphetamines are taken intravenously in large amounts, an ecstatic "high" occurs which decreases over a few hours. Re-injection is then necessary to reproduce the stimulation. This cycle can go on for days until the person is physically exhausted. Shakiness, itching, muscle pains, and tension states are common. Collapse and death have occurred.

Upon withdrawal the "speed freak" feels terribly depressed and lethargic. Re-injection of amphetamines relieves these symptoms. Since tolerance to high doses develops and withdrawal symptoms occur, large amounts of amphetamines are considered physically addicting. Small amounts are psychologically habituating.

#### WHAT ARE THE PHYSICAL COMPLICATIONS OF AMPHETAMINE ABUSE?

In addition to those diseases which accompany the unsterile injection of material into the body, the excessive amounts of amphetamines can cause certain medical problems. Liver damage may result from the enormous quantities being taken. Brain damage from such quantities has been demonstrated in animals. Abnormal rhythms of the heart have occurred, and a marked increase in blood pressure is well known.

Neglect of personal hygiene can lead to skin infections or dental decay. Drastic weight loss, and malnutrition and vitamin deficiencies are part of the list of adverse physical complications.

#### WHAT ARE THE PSYCHIATRIC COMPLICATIONS OF AMPHETAMINE ABUSE?

While under the influence of large amounts of amphetamines, the individual may become overactive, irritable, talkative, suspicious and sometimes violent. He reacts impulsively. This combination can lead to belligerent or homicidal behavior.

There is a deterioration of all social, familial and moral values. Like the heroin addict, the "speed freak" will do anything to obtain his supplies.

The paranoid psychotic state can last long beyond the period of drug activity and resembles paranoid schizophrenia.

WHAT CAN BE DONE ABOUT THE "SPEED" PROBLEM?

The elimination of the large-scale illicit supplies and better controls over legitimate production are part of the answer. In addition, the consequences and complications must be made known as widely as possible. The user needs skilled treatment. It is likely that only the very disturbed person will become involved in the "speed" scene if the known effects of taking the drug are properly disseminated.

ARE THERE ANY SPECIAL DIFFICULTIES IN THE TREATMENT OF STIMULANT ABUSERS?

The "speed freak" is a difficult patient to rehabilitate. Although he may want to stop using the drug, his "high" is so intense that he is attracted to the enormous euphoria that he obtains from the chemical. Persons who seem to have broken the speed habit often relapse.

Treatment may require the close support of the user's friends and family, plus medical and psychological help. In some cases, closed-ward hospitalization may be necessary. One of the more successful forms of treatment is group therapy in which ex-users interact with "speed freaks." Those who have come through the "speed" scene are trusted, and their counsel is likely to be accepted by the person who wants to stop his destructive use of the drug.

WHY HAS SWEDEN VIRTUALLY ABOLISHED THE MEDICAL USE OF AMPHETAMINES?

Sweden has a major problem with the amphetamine-like substance, phenmetrazine (Preludin). It was introduced as a "safe" weight reducing pill, but for the past 10 years its illicit use has been increasing. It is estimated that about 10,000 people (Sweden has a population of 8 million) use large amounts of this drug, most of it by intravenous injection.

At present only those few cases which are approved by a special commission can be legally treated with amphetamines. Despite this cutoff of legitimate supplies, the problem continues. Illegal laboratories still provide the material, and much is brought in from other countries where it is readily available.