

SWANSEA DRUG NOTES NO. 2
AMPHETAMINE
(speed, whizz, 'phet)

AMPHETAMINE

Amphetamine/speed is the most commonly used illegal powder in Swansea. It has been popular in South Wales since the 1970s. Prior to that time amphetamine had been available only as a prescription drug.

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Amphetamine is available as an off-white powder. Occasionally it comes in a lightly coloured powder (pink, and yellow have been seen). It is also sold as a putty like paste, and occasionally in a crystalline form.

STRENGTH

Manufactured simply in illegal laboratories across Europe (including, from time-to-time, Wales). The powder is adulterated at several stages. Swansea street speed has usually been under 10% amphetamine (and often half that strength). However stronger batches have been more common since 1999. It is not possible to judge the strength of any powder.

Speed is 'cut' mainly with glucose and lactose.

HOW IT IS USED

Amphetamine can be eaten, snorted or injected.

It can also be smoked but this is quite rare.

When eaten the effects will begin in ½ hour – 1 hour. When snorted or injected the effects are more immediate.

WHAT THE EFFECTS ARE

Amphetamine makes users feel alert and want to talk and move. It reduces hunger and fatigue. It gives confidence in social situations. However the user may also become obsessive. It increases heart rate and blood pressure. People grind their teeth. The pupils of the eyes dilate. It causes dehydration.

It also causes restlessness, anxiety, fear and paranoia. In extreme cases it can cause a psychosis similar to paranoid schizophrenia. This usually passes in a few days with rest.

All users will experience a rebound effect when the drug wears off. This 'comedown' can include extreme lethargy, hunger, and depression.

HOW LONG IT STAYS IN THE BODY

Amphetamine is detectable in urine for up to 48 hours after use.

MIXING WITH OTHER DRUGS

People often take speed with alcohol or with Valium – to 'take the edge' off the speed or to give alertness to the booze. People also use 'downers' to overcome the 'comedown'. This can lead to increasing problems as people alternate 'uppers' and 'downers'.

LONGER TERM USE

Speed is used in “binges” more often than daily use. Tolerance will develop and people will increase the dose they take to obtain the effect they seek. Regular users can find it difficult to function without the drug. They often have physical, psychological and social difficulties.

Common difficulties include problems as paranoia is more acute. Especially notable is deterioration of teeth and gums.

MEDICAL NOTE

Amphetamine belongs to the group of drugs that includes Ritalin and Dexedrine which are used for the treatment of children with Attention Deficit Disorder. National Guidelines have been issued to ensure that these drugs are used only when they are likely to be effective.

Risk and help

The Law – Amphetamine is a Class B drug under the Misuse of Drugs Act (1971). It is illegal to possess or supply in any way. When the amphetamine is prepared for injection it becomes a Class A drug.

Accidents – As people become more confident they are more likely to take risks.

Mixing – Any mixing of drugs will cause more problems than any drug on its own.

Dehydration – Replace any loss of fluid.

Psychosis – Users may believe that friends and strangers are attacking them. It will often be necessary to seek medical help

Other Help for New Users – Drugs education can be helpful if given carefully, encouraging other activities. Learn to talk and to listen without lecturing. Remember most experimenters will not go on to become regular users.

Well Being – Regular users can become physically unwell through poor diet and lack of proper sleep. It is important users pay attention to regular nutrition, rest and exercise. The heavier the use the more unpleasant the after effects will be. The user must give themselves time to recover properly.

Psychological damage – Regular users will sometimes find their lives becoming difficult to manage. This may impact especially seriously where there are children or other dependants.

Addiction – Psychological addiction can occur. Users will need to be given an opportunity to detoxify and help coping with depression and lethargy that may occur.

Finance – Any regular use of even quite cheap drugs can cause financial problems.

Injecting – Injecting users run the risk of illness caused through adulterants.

Injectors who share any equipment or water run the risk of viral infection – including Hepatitis C and in some cases HIV/AIDS.

Swansea Drugs Notes

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