

A large, stylized letter 'S' in a light peach color with a subtle gradient, set against a solid red background. The 'S' is thick and rounded, with a slight shadow effect.

is for

The word 'SPEED' in a bold, white, sans-serif font, rendered with a horizontal motion blur effect. The letters are slightly tilted and have a soft, glowing edge, giving a sense of speed and movement.

WHAT IS SPEED? (a.k.a. Methamphetamine, Amphetamine, Crank, Crystal, Tweek, Meth)

Speed is a synthetic stimulant. Synthetic means it's made in a lab, stimulant means it gets you up and keeps you going. Speed affects your central nervous system in the same way that adrenaline (your body's natural stimulant) works. It speeds up your body's functioning by increasing your heart rate and pulse and increasing your wakefulness, which, in turn, intensifies your concentration and thought processes. While there are different kinds of speed, each kind basically affects you in the same way. Meth, however, is generally stronger than pills like benzedrine or dexadrine (bennies, beans, black beauties, pep pills, truckers).

When you take speed, it stimulates the parts of your brain and the chemicals responsible for thought organization, focused concentration, pleasure and reward, fine motor control, sex drive, and increased energy levels. Dopamine is the "pleasure" chemical in the brain most affected by speed. Speed initially increases the functioning of these systems and the production of dopamine. That's what creates the high you feel. Eventually, though, the brain's natural receptor sites stop producing dopamine and you need the speed in order to feel good again.

HOW IS SPEED USED?

How you take speed directly influences how quickly it gets into your system, how long the high lasts, how powerful the effects may be and what the health risks are.

Swallowing is the safest way of using speed. Its effect takes longer and the high is not as powerful as injecting or smoking. Drugs that you swallow have to pass through your stomach and liver before they can get to your brain. It can take 20 to 30 minutes.

When you **snort** speed, the drug is absorbed by the tiny blood vessels in the mucous membranes lining your nasal passages. You get high more quickly than when you swallow, but less than smoking or injecting. It takes 3 to 5 minutes.

Smoking is the quickest method. The vaporized drug enters your lungs and is rapidly absorbed through the tiny blood vessels lining the air sacs of the lungs. Your drug-laden blood is then pumped throughout your body and brain. This takes 7 to 10 seconds.

Injection is quick and potent. If you inject speed, it is important to do so intravenously (mainlining, IV, slamming). *Skin popping* or *muscling* speed greatly increases the risk of abscesses, as speed is very difficult for the tissue to absorb and can cause damage to skin and muscle. It takes 15 to 30 seconds to get high if you inject directly into a vein.

EFFECTS, TOLERANCE & ADDICTION

Speed has the ability to make you feel good. You can have intense feelings of pleasure and well-being and be able to function at top speed, getting lots of work or studying done or dancing all night. Of course, with the up, comes the down. There are not-so-pleasurable effects of using speed also. Like other drugs, the more you use speed, the more your body needs. This is called tolerance. Tolerance occurs more rapidly when speed is injected or smoked. Speed tells your body that you don't need food or sleep, so you are extremely tired and depleted when you take a break. Depression, nightmares and insomnia are also side effects of using speed. Then there's the crash. To avoid crashing, people often take more speed which intensifies the negative effects of the crash when it does come, and the crash always comes.

Depending upon the dose (how much you take) and the purity of the speed, physical effects may include some or all of the following:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increase in breathing and heart rate• Rise in blood pressure• Dehydration• Loss of appetite• Enlarged pupils• Decreased circulation in arms, legs, hands and feet | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Constipation or diarrhea• Dryness of mouth• Sweating• Headaches• Teeth grinding and jaw clenching• Acute mood swings• Malnutrition |
|--|--|

Amphetamine psychosis is a condition that is characterized by excessive mood swings, agitation, irritability and confusion. It can occur in low doses, but with regular use in high doses, it can become serious. The condition goes away when you stop using and the speed has left your body, usually in a few days. Although, with heavy use it has been known to last for up to a year.

RISKS AND PREVENTING THEM

Speed tends to make you believe your body doesn't need to sleep or eat. But this is not the case! Your body has the same needs when you are high as when you are not, you still need to eat, sleep and drink.

- To avoid extreme exhaustion, take a break from using. Allow your body to recover. The best break is one that allows your regular sleep pattern to return, enables you to lose the fatigue and depression and go back to eating regularly. This will also reduce your tolerance and not force you to do so much just to get high.
- To avoid malnutrition and/or dehydration eat well and drink lots of water. Also, minimize alcohol intake because it also dehydrates you and can lead to a more severe crash.

There is no "quality control" in speed production. In fact, non-prescription speed is most commonly made in labs in people's homes or motel rooms. Consequently, the quality of the drug will vary from place to place person to person, supplier to supplier. Speed is cut with many different chemicals and often it is those chemicals that are the most harmful.

- Sample the speed first, particularly if you plan on injecting (see tips under Overdose).
- Try to find a regular supplier whom you trust.

Smoking can result in lung and throat damage, stroke, abnormal heart rhythms and extremely high blood pressure. It can result in cut lips (especially smoking with a broken glass stem) which increases the risk of contracting infectious diseases such as HIV and/or hepatitis. Sharing pipes or stems can transmit herpes and/or TB as well.

- If you smoke speed from a pipe, cover the mouthpiece of the stem with tape or rubber to avoid cuts or heat burns.

RISKS AND PREVENTING THEM

Injecting has specific risks. Speed injectors tend to inject frequently because the high is intense, but quick. Injecting in the same spot repeatedly increases the risk of abscesses and collapsed veins. Skin popping or muscling speed (injecting into muscle) increases your risk for abscesses because the cut in the drug is not absorbed into the blood stream (unlike opiates) and can sit under your skin for long periods of time. This can also happen if you miss a shot.

- Use a sharp, sterile syringe each time you inject.
- Do not share any paraphernalia (including syringes and stems) to avoid the transmission of HIV, hepatitis, TB and other infectious diseases.
- Use alcohol pads on the injection site before fixing.
- Rotate injection sites.
- Take your time and make sure you're in the vein before you inject.
- If you skin pop, then immediately apply hot water with a wash cloth or compress to prevent an abscess and infection.

Crashing

The more you use speed, the harder the crash or comedown. While it is different for everyone, people generally experience the following: fatigue, vivid and unpleasant dreams, insomnia, increased appetite, paranoia, involuntary muscular activity, decreased concentration and attention span, and severe depression.

- Acupuncture – especially 5-point detox modality – can help stabilize and balance damaged dopamine production sites.
- Using a small amount of Valium can take the edge off of crashing. If you use Valium,

RISKS AND PREVENTING THEM

use small amounts and beware that it has its own tolerance and side effects to consider. Skullcap and Valerian Root tinctures or pills are herbal alternatives.

- Eat, sleep and drink plenty of water and juice, even if you are not hungry and especially if you've been on a binge.

Overdose

A speed overdose is the result of the heart speeding up too fast and causing a heart attack or stroke. The clearest sign that someone is overdosing is that his or her face turns blue. They may also look very pale, be very limp, are able to breathe and look at you but not able to talk. Breathing and pulse (heart rate) may be slow and shallow and may stop altogether. They may foam at the mouth, vomit, shake or have a seizure, complain of chest pain, pressure, tightness or shortness of breath or suddenly collapse and become unconscious.

- Sample the speed (particularly if you plan on injecting). For example, do half a hit or inject the hit extra slowly. **Do this especially when the drug is from a new source or if you haven't used for a while and your tolerance is down.**
- Mixing speed with opiates (known as speedballing) increases the risk of overdose because the body is receiving two very different messages: hurry up and slow down.

Overdoses are very serious but do not have to be fatal. Often, the difference between life and death depends on who is around and what actions she or he take to care for a person who has overdosed. If you see someone exhibiting the symptoms above, **call 911!**



For additional copies, comments and questions contact:

Harm Reduction Coalition
22 West 27th Street, 9th Floor
New York, NY 10001

Phone: (212) 213-6376
Fax: (212) 213-6582
Email: hrc@harmreduction.org

Local Contact:

The Straight Dope Education Series

Created to provide accurate information about drugs so that people can make rational, safer and informed decisions about their drug use.

This publication is designed to provide accurate and authoritative information about the subject matter covered. It is distributed with the understanding that Harm Reduction Coalition is not engaged in rendering medical, legal or other professional services.

©HRC 1998