



Amphetamine-type-stimulants

Amphetamine-type-stimulants (ATS) include speed, ice, base, crystal meth, ecstasy and cocaine. These drugs speed up the messages going to and from the brain. In low doses you may feel more awake, alert or confident. High doses may cause anxiety, paranoia and aggression. People who take ATS and who have pre-existing conditions or who have a family history of heart problems or strokes are at higher risk of possible fatal consequences.

Bingeing occurs when you consume an excessive amount of alcohol or other drugs over a short period of time. Bingeing also occurs when alcohol or drug use is consumed over a period of 48 hours or more (also known as a bender). Continuous bingeing, without resting or recovering, increases the chance of something going wrong as you are putting more strain on both your brain and your body.

Tolerance

Tolerance can occur when you use a drug repeatedly and your body becomes adapted to the amount of drug you have taken. You notice that you have to take larger amounts to feel the same effect.

Dependence

Dependence refers to a state when you continue to use despite wanting to stop and find it very difficult to stop. Dependence can also be caused by not wanting to go through withdrawal. You may find you want to avoid the effects of withdrawal by continuing to use.

Withdrawal (comedown)

When you have been using a drug for a period of time your body adapts to the effects of that drug. Some typical symptoms of withdrawal from ATS include hunger, aggression and irritability, fatigue or restless sleep, depression and feelings of distress or panic.

The effects of bingeing and regular use can be harmful to your brain and your body. Taking extra measures to look after yourself before, during and after can help you manage the 'aftermath' better. Also, if you've noticed that you've developed tolerance and possibly dependence, this may mean that you are struggling with a number of areas in your life. Professional support can help you manage this. Check out the referral page.

Effects on Mental Health

Depression

Depression is more than feeling sad. It's a low mood where the sufferer can feel unmotivated, unworthy, guilty, irritable or agitated and experience a loss of interest in previously pleasurable activities.

Re Balance Your Lifestyle

The relationship between alcohol and other drugs and depression can go both ways. Long term use of alcohol or other drugs can lead to problems in people's lives which can lead to depression.

On the other hand, people who struggle with symptoms of depression may use drugs such as ATS to lift their mood and give them energy. The difficulty with this is that the lift in mood and energy is often only short-lived. The depression can worsen as a result of the intense ups and come-downs. Withdrawing from ATS use can cause temporary symptoms of depression.

Combining stimulants with some antidepressant medication and herbal remedies such as St. John's Wort can cause Serotonin Syndrome. Symptoms can range from mild to severe and can include euphoria, increased heart rate, headaches, nausea, agitation, confusion, shivering, sweating, tremors, increased blood pressure, seizures, renal failure, coma and death.

Anxiety

Anxiety becomes a problem when fear and worry start to interfere with daily living. General anxiety is where a person may feel an overwhelming sense of anxiety and worry for no apparent reason. There can be a link between drug use and anxiety. ATS can trigger anxiety symptoms including an intense and overwhelming feeling of panic. Physical reactions include sweating, faintness, rapid heart beat, difficulty breathing and going to any length to avoid situations that cause anxiety e.g. being in cars or crowded places like shopping centres.

Psychosis

Drug use can induce a psychotic episode which can be described as an altered state of reality. Disorientation, memory problems and visual hallucinations are the most common symptoms (Mental Health Association NSW). If psychosis is caused by drug use alone, it will usually go away once the drug use has stopped. Many people don't even know that they are experiencing psychosis because the symptoms are often mild.

If you are experiencing a form of psychosis you're not alone. Many people have experienced psychosis and it can be treated. Once you experience a psychotic episode it's important to remember to seek help. The longer you let the episode persist the slower the recovery and the more persistent the symptoms. If you have experienced a psychotic episode before whilst using drugs, it is likely that you will experience it again the more you use these drugs, even if it is a small amount. Talk to a health care professional and be as honest as you can around your drug use.

The Black Dog Institute website- Depression and Bipolar Disorder Information Australia Treatment Protocol Project (2004). **Management of Mental Disorders** (Fourth Edition). Sydney WHO Collaborating Centre for Evidence in Mental Health Policy.
Getting your head around it 2009 A Dual Diagnosis Workbook : Reachout.com website