

## ▶ Running on empty

The speed scene has undergone *major* changes over the past few years with the resurgence of crystal, the introduction of ice, and a renewed interest in stimulants as a medical treatment for obesity and attention-deficit disorder.

Not only that, but the definition of what speed is and what it isn't has been subject to a lot of revisions as lookalikes and act-alikes and legal herbal stimulants have come and gone and come around again.

But one thing *hasn't* changed and isn't likely to. That's the idea that over-amping on speed — any type of speed — is a pretty risky way to live your life.

And while it may be stylish to look like you've never lusted after a leftover, and fatiguelessness might rank alongside cleanliness and godliness in your pantheon of personal values, you might also want to rethink your priorities if you think you need speed to put you where you want to be.

Because one other fact about speed that hasn't changed over the years is still the most important fact of all: Speed kills.

And what it doesn't kill, it burns out. Pass it on. ■



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## ▶ Fast times in Century 21

A basic premise in America is that faster is better. From instant tea to TV dinners, DSL to broadband and beyond, if there's a way to do something faster, we'll figure out how to do it, and not miss a beat — or a coffee break — in the bargain.

That's a big reason why stimulant drugs hold so much fascination for us all.

Speed seems as natural as mom and apple pie — maybe even more so, since today mom is on a diet and the



only apple pie in town is made by machines.

But speedy drugs *aren't* Mom's apple pie, not by a long shot. They're a complex group of chemicals with one thing in common: They can cause all sorts of problems for people who take them — and *all kinds* of people are taking them these days.

And not only are more people using speed, they're also using its most hypercharged form — crystal meth — and running into problems they never expected.

That's why we've put together this pamphlet.

Because sometimes what you don't know *can* hurt you. And that's true *times two* when what you don't know about is speed. And it's truer, still, when the speed you don't know about is crystal meth.

## ▶ Fast facts

Before we say anything about crystal and other forms of "real" speed, though, we'll do something that might seem a little unusual, by lumping together *all* stimulants — controlled substances and everyday chemicals like caffeine — under the general classification of "real" speed.

If that sounds funny (or morally-ambiguous) to you, we should explain that a basic property shared by *all* stimulants — prescription diet pills, over-the-counter stay-awake tablets, caffeinated colas or the overpriced Triple Mocha Latté



*Wired world.* Although crystal use exploded in the early '90s, meth use has soared even higher in recent years.

Risks are so high because meth works so well at overamping the central nervous system in zapping hunger and fatigue.



at the local espresso bar — is their ability to rev up the action of neurons in the central nervous system.

They all do it in similar ways, too.

In fact, stimulants differ only to the *degree* that they act in the brain and the *extent* to which they affect behavior — increasing alertness and confidence (or anxiety), decreasing appetite and fatigue.

And while it's hard to find fault with wanting to eat less and stay awake more, wanting to do either behind a hit or two of prescription speed or crystal meth can be a bigger problem than being overweight or tired. *Way* bigger.



## ▶ Crystal myths

The most potent form of speed available — with or without a prescription — is *methamphetamine*, A.K.A. crystal, crank, tweak, go-fast, and dozens of other names. In medicine, it comes in tablet form, as the prescription drug, Desoxyn®.

More often, though, it's cooked in makeshift labs and sold as a powder, which is injected, snorted, or swallowed. Smokeable forms of crystal, called "ice," "gak," and "glass," are also used.

Widely available in the 1960's, crystal faded in the '70s, as controls were tightened on legal production, which reduced its diversion onto the black market.

But in the 1990's, crystal made an amazing comeback. And it's been back in a big way ever since.

The result? Crystal became a hot new high to a new generation of users too young to know firsthand—or to have *heard* secondhand—the downside of uppers.

And *what* a downside they have. Risks are so extreme because the drug works so well at overamping the central nervous system and zapping feelings of hunger and fatigue.



The result is the same sort of physical stress that follows any extreme exertion—high mountain bridge jumping, for example, or skydiving.

But instead of giving the old body/mind a chance to chill between jumps (like any self-respecting bungee-jumping skydiver would do), crystal users extend speed “runs” for days or weeks, without food *or* rest, putting impossible demands on their bodies and brains.

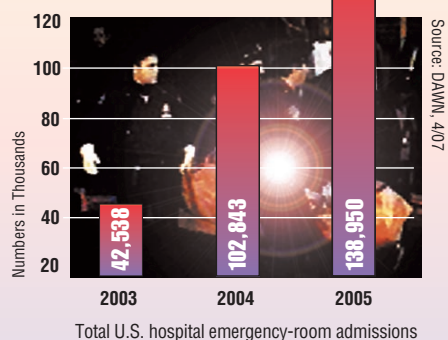
For needle users, add in the hazards that come with injecting *any* drug. And for ice smokers, multiply it all by the still largely-unknown risk factor of exposing lung tissue to vaporized meth crystals.

That’s why it’s not a big mystery that you don’t run into many old speed freaks in the real world.

They don’t live long enough to get old.

## ▶ Crash Landings

### U.S. Amphetamine Emergencies Surge



**Over the top.** Crystal meth and other amphetamine-related emergency room admissions have soared to record levels in recent years, reflecting high levels of use—and high levels of risk.

## ▶ A.K.A. ‘crank’

Know the big difference between crystal and crank? “Crystal” has seven letters, “crank” only has five. Once used mostly to distinguish down-and-dirty bootleg meth from its crystal-clean sibling, “crank” has become a generic nickname for all forms of speed. And that includes the tablets and capsules that find their way out of the local pharmacy and onto the street.

At this point, we’ll add other speedy drugs to the mix, including non-amphetamine prescription stimulants (like Ritalin® and phentermine), and such non-crystal forms of street speed as “white cross,” and “black beauties.”

Effects match up, in most ways, to the effects of crystal. Dangers are similar, too, although oral use carries fewer short-term risks, since the risk of lung or injection-site damage and overdose is reduced or eliminated.



*Toxic wasteland.* Meth labs are so toxic that biohazard crews are called to decontaminate “cooking” sites, as soon as they’re uncovered.

Still, a speed habit of *any* kind is a hazardous hobby for a lot of reasons, including simple wear and tear on the body and mind.

In a lot of ways, the human body is like a Timex watch—built to take a licking and keep on ticking. Still, we aren’t *exactly* indestructible. And speed, more than any other drug group, pushes the mind and body faster and further than either was meant to go.

The long-term physical toll can be massive, including any or all of the following:

- ▶ **Vitamin and mineral deficiencies.**
- ▶ **Lowered resistance to disease.**
- ▶ **Organ damage** (particularly to the lungs, liver, and kidneys) after long-term use.

And as if the physical hazards aren’t bad enough, there’s a *ton* of mind-and-mood problems that speed can bring on, or worsen. Examples:

- ▶ **Anxiety, depression, and chronic fatigue.**
- ▶ **Delusions.** (Thinking you’re being watched by enemies or police, for example—unless you *are* being watched by the police, which is even worse.)
- ▶ **Toxic psychosis** after prolonged, heavy use.

It’s not a big mystery that you don’t run into a lot of old speed freaks in the real world. They don’t live long enough to get old.



And that’s still only *part* of the story, because amphetamines also cause a serious form of dependency, which means that giving up speed can be a difficult process.

One reason why is that ex-users get depressed. Life without Mr. Crystal/Crank/Tweak/Go-Fast goes up the juice in the brain can seem dull, indeed, to a suddenly-straight ex-speed freak.



## ▶ Other speedy stuff

Because of their risks, you might think that amphetamines would have disappeared as medical drugs by now. But you’d be wrong.

Because prescription speed is back on the medical beat big time, and getting bigger all the time.

**Dexedrine®** (dextroamphetamine) and **Ritalin®** (methylphenidate) are used by millions of American kids and adults every day to treat attention-deficit disorder.

Others take a prescription stimulant, **phentermine**, which used to be half of the diet-drug duo, “fen-phen.” (The other half, *fenfluramine*, was pulled off the market in 1997, due to health hazards linked to it.) Now phentermine’s a solo act again.

Taken at prescribed doses, Ritalin, Dexedrine, and phentermine usually aren’t dangerous. Still, they’re *real* forms of speed, too, and deserve all the respect you can give them.

And don’t forget **lookalikes** and **herbal ecstasy**, which look and act (vaguely) like amphetamines and ecstasy, but contain only legal stimulants.

Still, just because the drugs are legal doesn’t mean they’re safe. They’re not—not always, anyway.

Most contain giga-jolts of caffeine and ephedrine, which *can* cause problems (even stroke or cardiac arrest) when overused, or when used *at all* by people who are hypersensitive to individual ingredients.

## ▶ Life After Meth: How to Get Off Speed

So what if your interest in speed goes beyond simple curiosity? What if you already *have* a problem—or someone you care about has a problem? Begin by admitting the truth. It’s hard to overcome anything until you recognize it for what it is. Then do something about it—or help the other person do something: Namely, quit.

Since the main pull amphetamines have on users is psychological, the biggest barrier you’ll need to overcome is yourself. Here are two ways around common speed-recovery pitfalls:

▶ **Depression.** Expect to feel more down than up, especially during the first few weeks or months. Just don’t let depression surprise you or beat you. Recognize funky feelings for what they are—the effects of withdrawal—and keep on staying straight.

▶ **Anxiety.** When you look at your life, you may find more to be bummed than buzzed about. Your body may carry some scars of speed use, either from disease or from general disrepair. Your head may be worse. Don’t panic. The body and mind have a remarkable ability to heal themselves—especially if you help them along.

So do what you have to do to pull yourself back together. Find another way to generate the energy and excitement that you used to get from speed. See a doctor if you suspect health problems, and visit a treatment program if you think you can’t do it alone. But do it—and keep it done.

And do it **now**. It’s never going to get easier than it already is—and, sometimes, it gets a whole lot worse. ■



*Kicking It.* Lose the blues that kick in when you quit by getting busy and staying straight.