

### Harm Reduction Tip Sheet for Workers - Amphetamines

This tip sheet is designed to support workers to provide harm reduction information to people who use amphetamines. These strategies may be helpful to explore with your client. This is not an exhaustive list, but workers may find the following harm reduction strategies helpful<sup>1 2</sup>.

- **Good nutrition:** Eating fresh, healthy food such as fruit, vegetables and fish, which are high in vitamins and other nutrients, can assist to maintain physical health. Try to eat regularly even if you are not hungry.
- **Plenty of rest and sleep:** People using amphetamine may not sleep well, or sleep at all. Inadequate sleep can impact severely on mental and physical health. Encourage the person to sleep daily or at least every second day or rest in a darkened room for a few hours each day. Using opioids to get some rest or sleep may increase the risk of opioid overdose.
- **Stay hydrated:** When using amphetamine type stimulants people can become dehydrated, particularly if using MDMA/ecstasy. Taking regular small sips of water, (about 250 mL per hour) or (500 - 600mL of water per hour) if very active or dancing, can reduce the risk of dehydration. However, drinking too much water can lead to hyponatremia (low sodium levels in blood), and can be fatal if left untreated. Avoid consuming caffeine-based drinks and energy drinks as they can increase blood pressure and the risk of stroke and heart attack. Drinking alcohol will cause further dehydration.
- **Personal hygiene:** Regular showering and changing into clean clothes can assist a person to feel physically and psychologically better.
- **Dental hygiene:** People may forget to brush their teeth or drink adequate amounts of water when using amphetamine which can lead to dental decay and increase the risk of infection. Encourage the person to brush their teeth using toothpaste and plenty of water at least daily. Chewing gum can help to produce saliva which can assist in reducing dental problems.
- **Anhedonia:** People who have been using amphetamine can often feel flat or joyless after they stop using. This can last for several days, and if the person has been using for months or years at increasing amounts, this can last longer. This is a normal reaction to an imbalance in levels of the neurotransmitter dopamine, caused by the use of amphetamine. Reassure the person experiencing anhedonia that this is normal and will get better with time.
- **Using less frequently and smaller amounts:** Toxicity and psychosis are associated with increased frequency of amphetamine use. Encourage the person to take a break from use and avoid using every day. If using amphetamines, try to use smaller amounts. This can decrease the risk of physical and psychological harms.

<sup>1</sup> Pinkham, S. and Stone, K. (2015). *A Global Review of the Harm Reduction Response to Amphetamines: An update*. London: Harm Reduction International Reports.

<sup>2</sup> S-Check Clinic. (2016, August). *Mind and Body*. Retrieved from <http://www.stimcheck.org.au/#/s-check/c1i8v>

- **Looking after each other:** Encouraging people to look after each other when using can promote early intervention if problems arise. Avoid using alone so someone can be a support or help if needed.
- **Mixing drugs (poly-drug use):** Mixing amphetamines with other stimulants can increase risk of toxicity, heart attack, stroke or seizure. Using alcohol in combination with amphetamines may inhibit amphetamine metabolism<sup>3</sup>. This may lead to higher amphetamine blood concentration, increasing its stimulating effects on brain and heart. Using amphetamines with drugs such as Viagra® or amyl nitrite can cause blood pressure to drop significantly. When they wear off, the amphetamines still in your system can cause blood pressure to rise sharply. This can increase the risk of heart attack or stroke.
- **Effects of amphetamines on the heart:** Regular use of amphetamines can increase the risk of heart attack and other cardiovascular complications<sup>4</sup>. Using less frequently and smaller amounts of amphetamines may reduce this risk.
- **Effects of amphetamines on mental health:** Amphetamine use can cause people to experience mental health issues. Reducing or ceasing use may alleviate this, however, if mental health issues continue (after a period of abstinence), provide referral information to the person and assist in an assertive referral process<sup>5</sup>.
- **Avoiding overheating:** Take regular breaks from dancing or strenuous activity. Fifteen minutes of rest is recommended for each hour of dancing or strenuous activity. Take care in hot environments. Take regular breaks in the shade or away from enclosed, crowded surroundings. Use a cool, wet towel or compress to reduce body temperature.
- **Blood-borne virus transmission:** Sharing drug paraphernalia (e.g. syringes, tourniquets or spoons) increases the risk of blood-borne virus transmission. Encourage the use of sterile injecting equipment every time. Avoid sharing tourniquets and spoons.
- **Sexual risk taking:** The use of amphetamines can increase libido and sexual risk taking. This can increase the risk of sexually transmitted infection and blood-borne viruses. Amphetamine use may effect decision making and the ability to give consent to sex. Encourage planning for safer sex, such as the use of condoms.

### Other harm reduction considerations:

- Avoid driving or operating machinery when using amphetamines
- Organise childcare before using amphetamines
- Plan how much to spend (buy groceries and pay bills before buying amphetamines)

<sup>3</sup> Althobaiti, Y. S., & Sari, Y. (2016). Alcohol Interactions with Psychostimulants: An Overview of Animal and Human Studies. *Journal of addiction research & therapy*, 7(3), 281. doi:10.4172/2155-6105.1000281

<sup>4</sup> Sinha, A., Lewis, O., Kumar, R., Yeruva, S., and Curry, B.H. (2016). Amphetamine Abuse Related Acute Myocardial Infarction. *Case Reports in Cardiology*. doi.org/10.1155/2016/7967851.

<sup>5</sup> Australian Medical Association. (2015). *Methamphetamine, Health: Mental Illness*. Retrieved from <https://ama.com.au/position-statement/methamphetamine-2015>