

What You Need to Know About Youth & Stimulants

NATIONAL
COUNCIL
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Wellbeing

WHAT ARE STIMULANTS?

Stimulants are a class of drugs that **speed up the communication pathways between the brain and body.**¹ Stimulants can be **prescribed drugs**, like amphetamines (Adderall), methylphenidate (Ritalin) and diet aids, or **illicit drugs** such as methamphetamine (meth), cocaine, MDMA and synthetic cathinone (“bath salts”).¹ Caffeine and nicotine are the two most commonly used stimulants.²

HOW ARE STIMULANTS USED?

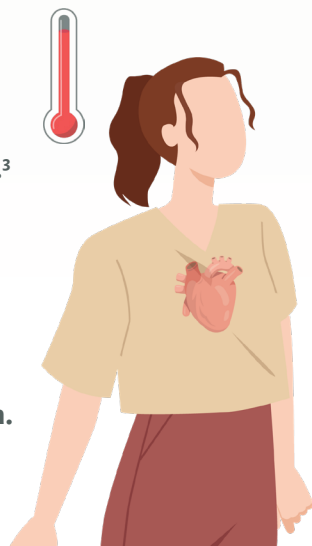
Depending on their form, stimulants can be snorted as a powder, swallowed as a pill, smoked as a rock or injected as a liquid.¹⁻² Stimulants are **commonly used with other substances**, such as alcohol and marijuana.²

WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF STIMULANTS?

Stimulants are sometimes called “**uppers**” because they can make a person **feel more awake, alert, energetic and confident**² and can **reverse feelings of mental and physical fatigue.**¹ Even in small amounts, stimulants can cause euphoria, increased heart rate, blood pressure, increased alertness, talkativeness, reduced appetite, headaches, stomachaches and nausea.² Large doses can cause anxiety, panic, depression, paranoia, aggression, heart palpitations, chest pain, high fever, seizures and coma.¹

WHAT ARE THE RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH STIMULANTS?

Stimulants are **addictive** because they cause energy enhancement and euphoria. **Tolerance** can develop quickly and increase the risk for a **substance use disorder.**³ In addition, stimulants affect the body’s cardiovascular and temperature-regulating systems. Thus, **physical exertion**, such as intense workouts, dancing and physical labor, **can increase risks for heart failure, and even death.**



One in five overdoses in the United States involves cocaine, and this number grows annually.⁴ The risk of overdose increases when stimulants are taken in combination with other drugs, such as benzodiazepines (Xanax).⁴ **Lacing or cutting** - the contamination of one substance with another - **is becoming more common, particularly with fentanyl**, an opioid that is 50x more powerful than heroin.⁴ Contamination is often unknown to the user and has led to a 46% increase in 2020 from fentanyl contaminated stimulants.⁵

HOW MANY HIGH SCHOOLERS DO NOT USE STIMULANTS?

95.7%

12th graders

94.7%

8th graders

The use of amphetamines (Adderall) is more prevalent among youth populations than other stimulants, as some middle and high school students have prescriptions to manage their attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and then share and/or sell pills to friends and classmates.⁶⁻⁷ Youth reporting past-year use of amphetamines increased from 2017 to 2020 among 8th graders (3.5% in 2017 to 5.3% in 2020)⁶ but decreased among 12th graders (5.9% to 4.3%).⁷

CAN STIMULANTS BE TAKEN SAFELY?

Prescription stimulants can be used safely when prescribed by a medical professional and taken as directed.³

REFERENCES

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