

There is some good news: Research has shown that speed users who stay off the drug for at least nine months can regain their body's ability to produce dopamine. However, while dopamine production resumes, there is not much improvement in cognitive function.

### Seeking help

If you doubt in any way that speed has become a problem, consider the fact that there is at least a month wait for anyone trying to get into a speed rehab program. This means many men have come to the opposite conclusion: speed use in their lives has become a problem. It is my opinion that, dose for dose, speed is the most physically harmful drug out there. Unfortunately, people don't usually stop using a drug they really like unless they can see that their life is better in some way without it. Whether you choose to quit, or just use speed more intelligently, is ultimately your decision alone.

### Local Resources

**Acceptance Place, Baker Places, Inc.**  
673 San Jose Avenue (415) 621-1326.

**Crystal Meth Anonymous:** For more information call (213) 488-4455 or visit their website at [crystalmeth.org](http://crystalmeth.org).

**Drug Information and Referral:** 24-hour hotline that provides information and referrals to various substance abuse programs. Call (415) 362-3400.

**Drug Detox Program:** Outpatient, medical drug detox, HIV acute care, counseling and education, free. Call (415) 565-1909.

**Haight Ashbury Free Clinics**  
529 Clayton Street. Call (415) 565-1908.

**Harbor Lights:** Salvation Army Harbor Light Detox program for people with HIV/AIDS. Call (415) 503-3072.

**HIV/AIDS Risk Reduction Program** at the Haight Ashbury Free Clinic. Behavior change support group for gay/bi men with focus on speed injection and unsafe sex. Call (415) 565-1927. Ask for Bill or Bonnie.

**LifeRing Secular Recovery:** For more information visit their website at [unbooked.com](http://unbooked.com) or call (415) 622-4890. Ask for Mark Connors.

**Oznam Detox Center:**  
175 Howard Street. Call (415) 621 6471.

**New Leaf:** Call (415) 626-7000, ext. 220.

**Smart Recovery:** Self-help meetings (alternative to 12-step programs). Call (415) 673-2848.

**The Stonewall Project** Call (415) 502-1999 or visit [tweaker.org](http://tweaker.org) for information.

**S.T.O.P.** (Stimulant Treatment Outpatient Program) 3180 18th Street, Suite 202. Call (415) 502-5777.

**Walden House Multi-services Center:** Outpatient, long term and day treatment for alcohol and drug abuse. SF residents only. Call (415) 554-1450.

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### On the Web

[crystalmeth.org](http://crystalmeth.org)

[tweaker.org](http://tweaker.org)

[unbooked.com](http://unbooked.com)

**Club Drug Counselor:** Information about club drugs and safety. [clubdrugcounselor.com](http://clubdrugcounselor.com)

**DanceSafe:** Information about health and safety within the rave and nightclub community. [dancesafe.org](http://dancesafe.org)

**Do It Now Foundation:** Youth drug abuse prevention. [doitnow.org](http://doitnow.org)

**Freevibe:** For young people on the dangers of drug use. [freevibe.com](http://freevibe.com)

**Harm Reduction Coalition:** Information on reducing drug-related harm. [harmreduction.org](http://harmreduction.org)

### Local STD/HIV Testing Sites

**www.stdtest.org.** Online testing. 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

**City Clinic:** 356 7th Street. Testing: Monday, Wednesday and Friday, 8am to 4pm; Tuesday 1pm to 6pm and Thursday 1pm to 4pm. Phone (415) 487-5500. On the web [sfcityclinic.org](http://sfcityclinic.org)

**Magnet:** 4122 18th Street. Tuesday through Saturday. Phone (415) 581-1600 for testing schedule or visit their website at [magnetsf.org](http://magnetsf.org)

**Positive Health Project West:** 3180 18th Street, Suite 301. Testing: Monday through Friday 10am to 2:30pm. Visit their website at [positivehealthproject.org](http://positivehealthproject.org)

# A Few Things To Know About Speed



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San Francisco Department of Public Health

## A FEW THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT SPEED

by Aaron J. Cohen

There has been a lot of attention in the last few months addressing the many dangers of methamphetamine use and its contribution to the significant increase in new cases of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases, particularly gonorrhea and syphilis. This brochure is all about facts—facts about methamphetamine use. What you do with them is your decision. It is all about weighing your priorities.

Whatever you may believe, the facts are in:

- One quarter of gay and bisexual men who tested positive for syphilis reported recent speed use.
- Gay and bisexual men with rectal gonorrhea were three times—or 300 percent—more likely to have recently used speed.
- Thirty-nine percent of non-speed using gay men having receptive anal intercourse say they always use a condom, compared to 24 percent of gay men who use speed.

Those smart enough to use a condom while using speed are not completely out of hot water. Condoms are nearly twice as likely to break when sex and speed are involved. This is likely due to the fact that one of speed's most attractive features is its ability to allow you to have longer and more intense sex than without it.

In this culture of youth and vanity, we are constantly bombarded with media that directly associates our self-worth with how good we look. Arguably, gay men, more than any other group, face the greatest amount of this pressure.

Toward that end, we work out constantly, eliminate any extra dietary fat, eat overpriced organic produce and shun preservatives and additives. Ironically, many of us (40% of gay men in San Francisco) think nothing of inhaling or injecting hydrochloric and battery acids, drain cleaner, lye and antifreeze into our bodies. As many of you may already know, these are the compounds commonly used to make methamphetamine.

### Speed, STDs and HIV

With regard to the connection between speed and STDs, here is some data: It is now estimated that gay men in California who use speed are twice as likely to be positive for STDs than gay men who don't use it.

Speed can have indirect, but just as serious, effects on your HIV infection. In the euphoria and resulting crash associated with speed use, it is not only easy to forget to take your HIV medications, it is predictable. The absolute truth is that if you are on HIV medications you need to be at least 95 percent adherent in order to prevent developing genetic mutations in HIV that allow it to become resistant to the medications. Even more serious is the fact that some types of mutations can rule out an entire class of drugs, possibly leaving you with very few treatment options. The bottom line is this: If you are not going to take your meds 95 percent of the time, you are doing more harm to your body than if you didn't take them at all.

On a related note, if you use speed and take HIV meds, a few things that should be brought to your attention. Liver function can be impaired by HIV, and for those with hepatitis B or C infections this is even more of a problem.

The liver serves as a detoxifier and when it is suffering, it can be difficult for it to break down medications or toxins, such as speed. As a result, meth remains in the body longer, and at higher concentrations than they would in people without these conditions. You may be taking more of a drug than your body can handle without realizing it.

HIV meds, particularly protease inhibitors, have a similar effect. Two of these meds—Norvir and Saquinavir, are especially known to slow the breakdown of many drugs. This is why they are often used in conjunction with other HIV medications—to boost effectiveness. These drugs can also boost the amount of speed in your blood by two to three times the amount that would be present if you were not taking these medications. Therefore, if you take protease inhibitors, you might want to think about eliminating, or at least, minimizing your use of meth. Regardless, it is clearly a good idea to use less at any given time.

It is commonly known that speed limits a man's ability to maintain an erection. Hence, Viagra is commonly used in conjunction with speed to boost sexual stamina. Not many people know that HIV meds such as Norvir and drugs that contain it, such as Kaletra, also have interactions with Viagra. If you use Viagra with speed, and are taking HIV meds, be sure to use a 25mg dose (rather than the big 100mg pill) and never take more than one dose in 48 hours.

### Speed and the Brain

Most of us know the short-term effects of speed; the reasons why people take it in the first place. These include a euphoric sense of well-being as well as a reduced appetite, dehydration and

increased body temperature. Not everyone is as familiar with speed's long-term effects. These include addiction, stroke, heartbeat irregularities, violent behavior, anxiety, confusion and paranoia. Single doses of speed can cause damage to dopamine receptors.

For those with a more limited knowledge of anatomy, the brain is composed of billions of cells called neurons (nerve cells). These carry electrical signals through a variety of different chemicals (neurotransmitters) that make up our voluntary and involuntary thoughts. Speed has the effect it does because it chemically resembles two of these neurotransmitters: dopamine and norepinephrine, and forces the neurons to release these chemicals in extra large amounts. Speed also interferes with the process in which they are naturally broken down.

Short-term use of speed results in a temporary reduction in the availability of these neurotransmitters, which causes the "crash". This is the cause of depression that is so common following speed use. In my personal experience, at least half the gay men I know are taking antidepressant medications. These medications work to regulate and correct shortages of neurotransmitters. If you're taking antidepressants and speed you are wasting your time. Speed only undermines the way antidepressants work.

Long-term speed use can result in serious damage to your neurons, impairing their ability to transport dopamine. The result is a condition very much like Parkinson's disease, which is also caused by a lack of dopamine. Like Parkinson's, symptoms of long-term speed use include diminished ability to think clearly and impaired motor function, or the ability to move properly.