

ALCOHOL AND DRUG DEPENDENCE FOUR – STIMULANTS

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(This is based on belief in God. If that offends you, stop reading now)

In this presentation, we will look at using stimulants to get more from our time.

In a world where we feel increasingly powerless, stories about superheroes hold a special attraction. In our fantasy worlds, we can be bigger, stronger and faster than anyone trying to make us do whatever we don't want to. In our dreams, we can accomplish more and be better than we could ever be in reality. Perhaps using stimulants might help. (To be continued)

General Description of Drugs in this Class:

Stimulants are drugs that elevate euphoria, create feelings of well-being and increase energy and alertness. Examples of stimulants include cocaine and crack cocaine (covered later), amphetamines, methamphetamine (covered later), methylphenidate (Ritalin), nicotine and MDMA, better known as Ecstasy). There is one other mild stimulant named caffeine.

Common Street Names: In pill form; speed, bennies, black beauties, crosses, hearts, LA turnaround, truck drivers and uppers. Methamphetamine (covered later) is known as speed, meth, chalk and tina. In smokable form, it can be called ice, crystal, crank, glass, fire and go fast. Tea, coffee and soft drinks are some street names of caffeine. It can also be bought as tablets.

How Stimulants Affect Users:

Stimulants change the way nerve cells in the brain communicate. Nerve cells communicate by releasing chemicals called neurotransmitters. These attach to key sites on neurons called receptors. There are many neurotransmitters, but dopamine is most affected by stimulants. Dopamine makes people feel good when doing something they enjoy, like eating chocolate cake or riding a roller coaster. Stimulants cause dopamine to build up in the brain, making users feel intense pleasure, more alert and like they have increased energy.

Legitimate Medical Uses:

Amphetamines are prescribed by doctors for medical problems, but are also abused for their effects on the brain. Caffeine is found in products like aspirin and nonprescription cough and cold remedies. It is also used in diet pills and some street drugs.

Reasons Behind Stimulant Use:

Stimulants initially produce euphoric effects, though repeated use can harm the brain's dopamine receptors, dampening users' ability to feel pleasure at all. More and more of the drug must then be taken, to experience the same pleasure.

Pleasure is the driving motive for most drug use. Drugs which are abused have pleasurable effects and those producing little pleasure are not abused. If we accept that as a motive, we must also accept that substances would not be used unless pleasure obtained from them was considered as a reward, worth a perceived low risk. Given the many unknowns involved, with substances added to drugs to cut them, it's hard to imagine how a good assessment of risk could ever be made.

Stimulants like amphetamines enhance moods. No matter how frustrated, things seem to smooth out when high. With heart rates up, we seem to think faster, have more energy, be more sociable and witty and accomplish everything faster.

The most obvious reason to use stimulants? They stimulate us. We are tired and use stimulants to artificially prolong our ability to function and accomplish tasks.

Consequences for Abuse of Stimulants

Physical Health

With all those benefits, what's the problem? Well...

Stimulants cause the heart to beat faster, so blood pressure and metabolism increase, leading to strokes or heart failure. Users become more talkative, energetic and anxious. Decreasing appetite lends to their use as diet pills. Single high doses can produce dangerously high body temperature, which can be lethal if not treated quickly.

Meth can cause a variety of heart problems, including rapid heart rate, irregular heartbeat, and irreversible, stroke-producing damage to small blood vessels in the brain. It can also cause high blood pressure, shortness of breath, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea.

Mental Health

Repeated stimulant use, especially amphetamines, leads to hostility or paranoia, violent behavior, anxiety, confusion and insomnia. Heavy users also experience psychotic symptoms like paranoia, auditory hallucinations, mood disturbances, and delusions (one is a sensation of insects creeping on the skin. Paranoia produces homicidal as well as suicidal thoughts. When deprived of caffeine, addicts suffer headaches, fatigue and get pretty irritable.

Probability of Addiction / Dependence

As with many other abused drugs, long-term stimulant abuse can result in addiction, compulsive drug-seeking and use, accompanied by functional and molecular changes in the brain. Too much caffeine causes anxiousness, headaches, the 'jitters' and may prevent sleep. Caffeine is addictive, so abruptly stopping its consumption can produce withdrawal symptoms.

Social or Societal Consequences

Dependence on stimulants and needing to obtain them will grow to quickly consume personal time and focus. An increasing focus on self will isolate users. The sudden crash when coming down from use of stimulants can be dangerous to everyone around them, if they must still drive or operate machinery. Some users believe methamphetamine increases their sex drive, but long-term use actually decreases sexual functioning, at least in men.

Legal Consequences

If caught purchasing or using medicine acting as an illegal stimulant, without a legitimate prescription, you will likely do time behind bars. If selling it to others, the sentence is longer.

The Trap Associated With Stimulant Use:

Most coffee drinkers on long drives use caffeine to keep going, even when driving becomes dangerous. The problem is that stimulants do not actually replace our need for sleep or food, just delays our acknowledgment of our need until our bodies crash. Energy must actually be metabolized from something, but there is nothing in stimulants that is actually usable for that. The demands of our bodies are hidden behind the perceived energy of the drugs. I heard a saying once that, "nature is not fooled by accounting schemes."

Sooner or later, we have to rest, even if we need that second job. A built in problem is that our bodies tend to burn through stored energy before crashing, so we come out of binging

stimulants, absolutely drained. As we build tolerance to stimulants, we keep going with less and less help from the drugs. If pushed too far, our bodies can go into convulsions, nausea and pass out. If we are not horizontal in bed at that point, consequences may be less than desirable.

The Rest of the Story:

Unfortunately, stimulants turn out to be more like villains than heroes. Offering a cruel hope, they offer nothing in terms of actual power or assistance. They just mock those who have become dependent on their dubious help, till they get an opportunity to destroy them.

A Practical Application:

We often look outside of ourselves for ways to make life work out a little better. But when we think we have, the questions change. Life may be a bit like this lock, with an unknown combination. We know there's a way to make life work, if we could just find the right combination. We try multiple solutions.

We can just keep guessing, twisting the lock back and forth on the chance it will eventually open. Don't you just hate it when that works, but you've tried so many things, you can't remember what you did to get there? So you close the lock and start guessing again.

Well meaning friends offer advice, like saying what we're doing won't work. Thanks for nothing. Some say, "Let me try for you." Of course, without the combination, they have no more success in making our lives work than we did. Now if anyone knew the combination, maybe they could just tell us?

We could also ask the manufacturer for the combination. Supposedly, each lock is unique and the solution is known to the maker.



A Historical Application:

When we meet Naaman in the fifth chapter of 2 Kings, his life is pretty impressive. But his resume ends with, "but he was a leper." Naaman didn't care for people dismissing his good qualities by identifying his weakness, but his problem was deadly. No matter how excellent his life, he would eventually die in a leper colony. There was no happy ending in his future.

Naaman got advice from people who cared, a solution if he could just believe it. His servant said there was a prophet of God in Israel, who knew the combination to miracles.

At Elisha's house, a servant came out with a message. Naaman was to go dip seven times in the Jordan river. Naaman expected a better solution and didn't care to be greeted by a servant instead of the prophet. Prone to infection, the muddy Jordan held no interest. So he headed home.

He was asked, "If Elisha had asked you to do some great thing, wouldn't you have done it?" Naaman realized nothing else had worked. So went to the Jordan, waded in and started dunking. He must have wanted to stop after six times with no change, but he also wanted to live. So he went under for the seventh time, coming up with skin like that of a new born baby.

Had Naaman not followed instructions, stopped on number six, he would've just died.

Trying Out a Better Way

These presentations won't change you. They just offer tools for change and a little hope. For those interested in a life that works as intended by the Maker, they do offer a combination. It's not one we make up, but one we get from our Creator. Just like Elisha supplied to Naaman.

Some will never try it, seeking a more impressive solution. Some will start out obeying, but won't finish the combination, more worried about the opinions of watching friends than in a

better life. But for those willing and interested, who want to really live, your Maker still knows who exactly you are. And he still offers the key to unlocking a whole new life for you.



The Healing of Naaman - Poussin

