

RITALIN What's up with Ritalin abuse?

By: Sorika de Swardt – Addiction Consultant Elim Clinic



Kiddies' cocaine, R-ball, Rits, Legal High and Smarties are all street names for the study drug Ritalin. If you thought that you only need to be concerned about illegal drugs, you are mistaken. Cheryl, a 21 year old student, initially thought that taking study drugs was a one-time event born out of desperation. She had three papers due in the same two-day period and when it came to writing the last paper she had run out of steam. "I thought I just needed a lift for the last exam. So I asked my friend who gets Ritalin prescribed, for one dose. I took it, and it was amazing how much I could crunch into a short period of time. I did very well in that last exam paper and so I couldn't resist doing it again and again and always a little bit more than the previous exam. That was, until I started to struggle with anxiety, depression and headaches".

Cheryl is one of too many people who thought that taking Ritalin if not prescribed for them, is as harmless as drinking a few cups of coffee or a sports drink or two. Why won't you use this wonder drug to your advantage? Ritalin is a stimulant and stimulants allow you to stay awake and get lots done in a shorter period of time. You suddenly feel like a superhuman and as a result, they're becoming the quick fix for teenagers, students and adults with heavy workloads and busy schedules. It works faster than learning time management skills and is more potent than those drinks that "give you wings". The appetite suppressing effect also makes it a trend amongst woman who wants to lose weight. What you may not know, however, is how dangerous stimulant abuse actually is.

Stimulants also known as uppers are a group of substances which stimulate the central nervous system and speeds it up. Essentially it puts the body into a maximum overdrive for a period. Legal stimulants include tobacco, caffeine, sugar and appetite suppressants (containing pseudoephedrine) whilst illegal stimulants in South Africa include cocaine, crack, LSD, ecstasy, amphetamine, tik (methamphetamine) and cat, which are amongst the most well known illegal stimulants. Cocaine and Ritalin have a similar chemical structure and both stimulate the increase of dopamine in the brain. Stimulants generally produce a fairly predictable set of side effects when they are used in high doses. Ritalin is no different and people who **abuse** it could expect a loss of appetite, tremors and twitching, fever, convulsions, headaches, irregular breathing and heart rate, anxiety, restlessness, paranoia, hallucinations, delusions and depression during the comedown period.

Specialists prescribe Ritalin (Schedule 6) and its generic equivalent Concerta to treat ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder), a condition characterised by extreme impulsivity (doing things without thinking about consequences), inattention (easily distracted, unable to focus) and/or hyperactivity (nonstop fidgeting). ADHD can be very successfully treated with Ritalin in many children and adults alike. However, there are a percentage of persons who don't respond well to the effect of stimulants and for them the other effective option in South Africa is Strattera. Strattera is not a stimulant drug and seems to be the medication of choice for persons with sensitivity to the effects of Ritalin.

First let me reassure you. If your Neurologist or Psychiatrist prescribed you Ritalin for a very specific condition and you use it exactly as it was prescribed to you, it will improve your focus, memory and general school or vocational functioning. **Please don't ever stop taking prescribed medication without medical supervision.** As Ritalin is similar to cocaine in chemical structure and dopamine enhancing effect, some believe it may be a gateway drug to the use of other more addictive drugs. However, the latest studies show that persons who take Ritalin as prescribed for ADHD, are less likely to experiment with other drugs (to self medicate) as those who have ADHD and are not on treatment. Using Ritalin when not prescribed, more than prescribed or via any other route than swallowing your exact prescribed dosage is dangerous and can even lead to death.

Often study drugs are abused by snorting the powder, which gives a very different effect than swallowing a slow release capsule of Ritalin. The doses are also often exceeded above what a doctor would recommend. Unfortunately the trend to buy and sell Ritalin to and from friends who get this medication prescribed to them is on the increase. Few know that selling prescription drugs is illegal if you are not a registered pharmacist. Dr. Richard Kadison wrote in *The New England Journal of Medicine* that teenagers are beginning to view stimulants as "safe 'brain steroids' that help to maximize performance with minimal risk"—even though this is not true. Doctors recommend that a careful family history and electrocardiogram (EKG) be performed before initiating the treatment of stimulants for people with ADHD. Anyone with a personal or family history of addiction, neurological or psychiatric conditions might be at greater risk of abusing any kind of drug or medication, but, even if you are not prone to addiction, the physical health risks of **abusing** any stimulant (including Ritalin) far outweighs the perceived short term benefits.

If you think you may be self-medicating (taking drugs recreationally to mask depression, anxiety or distractibility), it's time to seek help. If you are concerned about your use or abuse of stimulants or other prescription medication, please contact us without delay so we can arrange an assessment for you. For further information on medication abuse and treatment please visit our facebook page.

STIMULANT ABUSE

WHAT GOES UP MUST COME DOWN!

By: Sorika de Swardt – Addiction Consultant



Sorika de Swardt

Isaac Newton famously said “what goes up must come down”. He was referring to the law of gravity at that point but this is also very true of the use of drugs. For many drug users, the cycle of addiction begins with the feeling of euphoria that comes from ingesting a substance. The initial feel good factor is eventually replaced with an anxious and obsessive drive to get more drugs. Firstly because it feels good when you are on it and then because it feels really unpleasant when you come down / withdraw. Getting hooked and coming down from cannabis, alcohol and medicine is often a slow gradual process. It’s like rolling down a mountain, but coming down from tik or speed is more like falling off a cliff. So the only way to stop the withdrawal is to get another fix. That’s just it, the crash is unavoidable.

So, it makes sense to not seek unnatural highs to begin with. That would mean that we first learn to get high on life in a natural and balanced way. According to the urban dictionary ‘getting high on life’ means living your life to the fullest and doing things that are entirely designed to make you feel happy, buoyant or relaxed. Different things will work for different people but there are so many awesome treats in life to remind us that we can still have amazing feelings without the need for a substance. Whether you are into exercise, nature, arts, reading, gardening, good food, the latest gadgets or hanging round with friends on facebook or in a coffee shop, there is something for everyone. As long as we keep the balance, so long we will get a more even, natural high that does not leave us crashing down later.

Secondly we must learn how to change our trauma into something called post traumatic growth. We all suffer pain, loss,

stress and sometimes unbearably traumatic incidents. To numb ourselves with medication or drugs seems like one option. To be resilient is the second option. Both of these mean that you will survive even if another crisis happens. But you certainly don’t gain anything from the trauma. But there is another possibility. We already know that adversity can be a source of strength and that wisdom can come from great loss. “Many new studies about trauma found that people, when confronted by events powerful enough to shake their core sense of the world, do indeed gain from their ordeal”. This happens when we choose to struggle for psychological survival and whilst trying to adapt we reroute our lives into a direction that is better than it was. This phenomenon is called post-traumatic growth. In the same way an addict can change their life around after rehabilitation and recovery becomes the new and better direction. Even after a lapse the experience can be turned into a prolapse, a learning experience.

On a more universal level we all can benefit something from trauma if we choose. When people look back on a very traumatic time in their lives, they will often say things like, “I did not realize how strong I can be until being strong was the only option”. “I didn’t know many people care for me until I really needed their support” or “I never really appreciated the good in life until I nearly lost it”. More often than not you will hear them say that they grew nearer to God and that tangible presence carries them every day. We can choose to accept and explore the gifts hidden in the wings of pain.

Numbing ourselves against the pain, or seeking an escape with drugs, will isolate us from support. It will stop any opportunity for personal growth. It will only delay the inevitable crash, because it’s a law of gravity that what goes up, must come down!

Resources

SA Medical Journal. Dec 2012, Vol 102, No 12

www.learn-genetics.utah.edu - Ritalin and cocaine. The connection and the controversy.

www.rooirose.co.za - Ritalin se nuwe onwettige gebruike.

CAT

By: Suzanne Klaasen
– Therapist Elim Clinic



Suzanne Klaasen

Cat, letsies, Kayo, Gram, Line, Wannebee Speed or known by its scientific name, Methcathinone (mephedrone) is an addictive substance rapidly increasing on the South African drug scene. There is no medical or pharmaceutical use for this substance. It is mainly produced in illicit ‘cat labs’, for recreational purposes. It is often sold as ‘bath salts’ or ‘plant food’ and substitutes other stimulants such as cocaine and ecstasy.

Methcathinone or cat was first synthesised in 1928 and was used as an anti-depressant in the Soviet Union. In its natural form Cathinone is an organic substance derived from Khat trees (*Catha edulis*). Cat in turn is a man-made substitute for the chemical you find in

the Khat tree. The two should not be confused. The leaves of the Khat tree are chewed and are described as a mildly addictive stimulant. However, there is consistent evidence of overuse and addiction. In South Africa the Khat plant is called Bushman’s tree and African tree and is a protected species but the plant in itself is not illegal. However, the active ingredients Cathinone and Cathine are illegal to have, give away or sell.

Cat on the other hand is a synthetic stimulant produced by using a chemical process. It contains Methcathinone and is sold in a powder form. The effects of Methcathinone are more condensed and heightened. The powder form also works much quicker and is more potent. Both these are psychoactive stimulants and form part of the amphetamine range of drugs and can lead to psychological addiction.

Chemical ingredients used for the illicit manufacturing of cat are extremely toxic to the human body, and can cause lung damage if inhaled, or chemical burns if they come in contact with the skin. Some of the ingredients include ephedrine, pseudoephedrine, sulphuric acid, acetone, hydrochloric acid, paint thinners, battery acid and epsom salts, to name but a few. These materials are cheap and readily available and therefore home laboratories shot up throughout the country. It’s cheap to make but then sold to the user for between R250 and R300 a gram, leaving the manufacturer with a high profit. Tolerance develops quickly, and the user

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Peggy Ntswane

Tik, Crystal Meth, Speed, Meth, Ice, Shabu, Jib, Crank, Cold! Instantly addicting and often fatally potent. No matter where you are in the world these names are associated with one dangerous drug called methamphetamine, in South Africa referred to as Tik. It is prevalent largely in the Western Cape, but is gradually getting a foothold in other regions of the country. The December 2012 SACENDU report showed that 38.8% of all substance users admitted to rehabilitation centres in the Western Cape used Tik. Also, Tik was the fourth drug of choice in South Africa, after alcohol, dagga and heroin.

Methamphetamine is a stimulant drug (upper) and made its first appearance in Japan in 1919. It was popularized by World War II as troops were routinely given the drug to keep them awake and focused. A nasty side-effect was the levels of aggression troops exhibited, but in War, all is fair and so billions of methamphetamine pills were manufactured. After the war, they became available for civilian consumption and due to its potency, easy manufacturing and high potential for addiction; methamphetamine became open to wide-scale misuse! In South Africa, methamphetamine is classified as a Schedule 7 drug. It is outlawed except for the medical treatment of attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD) and obesity in some countries.

Tik is a bitter-tasting odourless crystalline powder that dissolves easily in water or alcohol. It also comes in pill form, presented in a variety of colours (brown, orange, yellow) of which white is the most common. It can also be in clear chunky crystals that look like ice. Tik is chemically processed in "underground" laboratories like residential kitchens. Unlike most illicit drugs that have a natural base (e.g. cocaine, and heroin), Tik is a purely synthetically produced drug. Its manufacture involves the use of ephedrine and chemicals such as iodine, red phosphorus, acetone, and ammonia and aeroplane fuel to name a few.

Tik is injected, smoked or snorted by the user and its rush lasts for 6 to 8 hours. Because of its fat solubility, Tik enters the brain at a rate much faster than other stimulants (e.g. cocaine). The user experiences a burst of

euphoria, accompanied by sudden alertness and concentration. There is increased self-esteem, self-confidence, energy, libido and sociability. It gives the "superman" effect and the person gets excessive feelings of power, invincibility and grandiosity.

Unfortunately many negative psychological effects accompany this general feeling of well-being. These include irritability, aggression, agitation, compulsive skin picking, hair pulling, obsessive behaviour, paranoia and hallucinations. With chronic use and /or high doses, the user may experience stimulant psychosis which includes catatonia, delusions, and hallucinations.

The physical effects of Tik include anorexia, hyperactivity, dry mouth and "meth mouth" (loss of teeth), dilated pupils, excessive sweating, flushed skin, dry mouth, diarrhoea, constipation, insomnia. With chronic and /or high doses, convulsions, heart attack, stroke and death occurs. Withdrawal symptoms of Tik are mostly fatigue, depression, suicidal ideation and excessive sleeping. The symptoms last from days to weeks depending on the frequency and amount of use. Basically "superman" loses his powers.

Tik correlates with the development of serious mental illness after prolonged use. Herein lies part of the problem. When you use something and its one of the best highs you have ever experienced, and there's no immediate negative effect, you might be tempted to think that this drug is fine. However, Tik is known to cause brain damage and is believed to fuel violent crimes. A stern warning for anyone who considers experimenting with this drug even once, comes from the many users who report that they were hooked from the first time they used. Some specialists believe that this is the most dangerous drug known to man.

Resources:

Wikipedia, SACENDU, www.drugfreeworld.org, Drugs and Drug Trafficking Act, 1992

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may develop both physical and psychological dependence with frequent use.

Cat is taken into the body by snorting or inhaling. It is water-soluble and therefore it can also be drunk / swallowed or injected when mixed with a liquid. The effect of cat has been described as being very similar to that of cocaine. Unlike cocaine, the 'high' effect can last up to six hours, making this a very popular recreational drug. Initially the user may experience intense feelings of euphoria, increased energy and confidence, loss of appetite, sociability and talkativeness. As with all other drugs there are the harmful side effects and health risks which may include:

- Nausea, loss of appetite and dangerous weight loss
- Nosebleeds and damage to the nasal cavities
- Hallucinations, paranoid delusions, mental confusion and the loss of the ability to make rational decisions
- Blurred vision and muddled speech
- Liver, kidney, lung and cardiovascular damage with prolonged use
- Depression, anxiety, insomnia, memory loss and violent behaviour
- Symptoms similar to those of Parkinson's disease from injecting the drug
- Greater risk of stroke, coma or death resulting from a blood pressure increase and an irregular cardiac rate

Withdrawal symptoms are similar to those of cocaine, lasting from two to three weeks or longer depending on the extent of use. Symptoms may include fatigue, depression, anxiety, irritability, headaches, agitation, hypersomnia (excessive sleeping), and increased appetite. Overdose can

occur with any quantity of drug used, and the user is always at risk. Overdose causes seizures, an increase in body temperature, respiratory failure, coma, and/or death.

Treating the dependency requires professional counselling and often clinical and medical treatment in a professional rehabilitation centre.

Resources

Drug Enforcement Administration, Office of Diversion Control, Drug and Chemical Evaluation Section, August 2013.

Live science, Mark Lallanilla, 3 July 2013; National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIH); www.tnt.org.za; www.drugs.com



Khat Leaves
(Catha edulis)



OMICS INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON ADDICTION: LAS VEGAS 2013

On 20th July 2013 Sorika de Swardt, Addiction Consultant at Elim Clinic, departed from OR Tambo International Airport on her way to the OMICS International Conference in Las Vegas. Along with 25 other addiction specialists from around the world, she was invited to present at the conference. Her presentation was about sex addiction and pornography.

The OMICS group hosts over 250 leading and peer reviewed journals and has organised over 100 scientific conferences throughout the world. It serves as a forum for leading scientists in the field of addiction to exchange ideas. "I am so humbled by the opportunity, but also very excited because I believe Elim Clinic renders a world class service and we can certainly make valuable contributions at the congress," Sorika said just before her departure.

"Addiction specialists have known for decades that sexual addiction is real, very powerful and creates a strong enough reaction in the brain to be compared to heroin addiction. The typical symptoms are the inability to control urges for the behaviour, even when the consequences are known to be tragic or negative". De Swardt said stigma and labelling prevents desperate sufferers to seek help and recovery. "The variety and sheer amount of sexual material pushed into the public arena across multiple formats like internet, television, social

media, games, books and movies, could be a factor in the rising numbers of people living with this addiction. While traditional psychotherapy is very useful with mental health problems, sexual addiction in particular needs a skill-specific practitioner, trained to support the sufferer to get a better understanding of their condition," she said. "When someone goes into rehab for alcoholism, its fairly straight forward, they can never touch alcohol again. They must abstain from any mood altering substance if they wish to remain in active recovery. Sex is a normal part of human nature and complete abstinence is not the answer for most addicts. Instead it is important to identify with the addict the sexual behaviour that has negative consequences and which makes them dysfunctional. There might be an initial period of abstinence so the addict can learn to cope in different ways and to experience healthy alternatives, but in the end the aim is to completely eliminate the unhealthy sexual behaviour as identified by the person and their partners," Sorika said.

Not only did Sorika bring back lots of information on the treatment of all the kinds of addictions, she also made lots of knowledgeable contacts in the field. Elim Clinic plans to invite dr Robert Weiss, Founder of the Sexual Recovery Institute in Los Angeles, to come and present some workshops for professionals on the topic of sex addiction and treatment in 2014. Please look out in future newsletters as well as on our website and facebook pages for information on CPD accredited training events.



ATHLETES EXCEL IN CROSS COUNTRY RACE

SLOW MAG MARATHON - CROSS COUNTRY CHAMPIONSHIP

Name	Event	Position	Category
Paulos Radebe	4km	2 nd	Open
Action Ramaboea	8 Km	4 th	35 +
Lucky Mtshali	2 Km	32 nd	Open
Phumlani Nkosi	4 km	42 nd	Open
Shoke Lechaba	4 km	10 th	30+



Donations

We thank you for your continued support

- Ms D Makwela
- Ms T Werner
- Mr S van Wyk and family



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