

Ephedrine: The ups and downs

by Jeremy Sloan
Collegian Staff

Next week is finals week. For those students who have kept up with their work all along, no problem. For others, finals week will mean long hours of cramming, and days of trying to get by on a few hours of sleep.

Traditionally, this ritual of self-abuse has included an ever-full cup of coffee and plenty of sugar laden snacks. More recently, in the effort to keep functioning long enough to get that last paper written, or that last chapter read, some students have been snorting white powder up the old schnoz as well.

Cocaine?

Nope.

Ephedrine.

Ephedrine is sold over-the-counter in tablet form, as a bronchial dilator. Ephedrine works by reducing blood flow to the bronchial tubes, opening them. This makes the drug useful as a treatment for allergies and for asthma. That's why ephedrine is sold without a prescription.

Technically, that is. But with brand names like "Max-Alert" and "Bolt," some pharmaceutical companies also take advantage of ephedrine's potential use as a stimulant.

Local convenience stores sell ephedrine tablets in small packages and bottles, well marked by brightly colored packaging and display boxes. They are often found in the same displays as caffeine pills. One ephedrine tablet usually contains twenty-five milligrams of the active

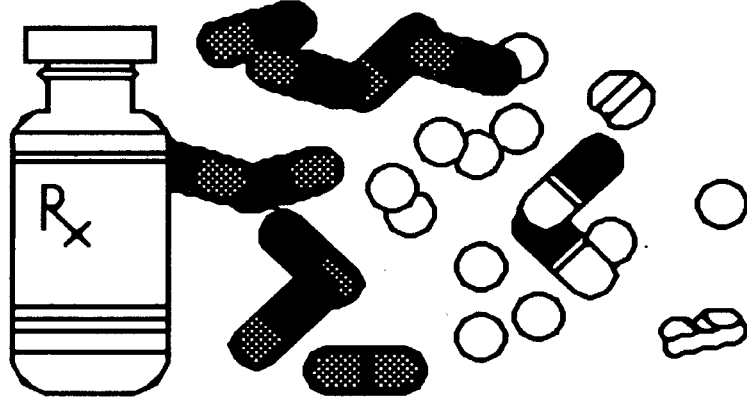
ingredient, enough to act as a bronchial dilator.

By federal law, the only approved use of over-the-counter ephedrine is that noted on its packaging. Any other use is illegal. A good deal of ephedrine use has nothing to do with asthma or allergies, however. Some people, especially some students and truck drivers, use the drug to stay awake.

Because the use of ephedrine as a stimulant is illegal, distributors rely on names which imply stimulant usage. For the same

consumption of alcohol and other drugs. He described using ephedrine on Saturday morning to "take the edge off of" his hangover and to keep him going Saturday afternoon, through a hard day of "smoking pot and getting drunk again."

Another student at Behrend, who reported less frequent use at lower dosages, described the stimulant effects of ephedrine as "cleaner than caffeine." She went on to say that ephedrine "doesn't cause the stomach cramps and shakes that coffee does."



reason, these distributors cannot give accurate information regarding the use of ephedrine as a stimulant.

The danger of this marketing strategy lies in the fact that users pass information about ephedrine as a stimulant, by rumor and by word of mouth, potentially inviting overdoses or harmful interaction with other drugs. Accurate information about the drug and is often lacking.

Why do some students prefer ephedrine use to caffeine use? At the extreme end, one student described using the substance as a "booster," in order to extend his

Individual experiences vary, though, and some users do report caffeine-like side effects.

Both students, though, considered ephedrine a more effective stimulant than caffeine. Ephedrine is used very casually in some circles, and its users rarely know much about the drug's potential side effects.

Taken orally, the stimulant properties of ephedrine take effect in about 30-60 minutes and last for approximately 3-4 hours. When crushed and inhaled like cocaine, the drug takes effect more rapidly.

At the recommended dosage,

ephedrine's side effects - insomnia and nervousness - are usually mild. Like any stimulant, though, ephedrine can be harmful.

Several Behrend students described ephedrine use at dosages significantly higher than its intended dosage, sometimes as high as 250mg-300mg, or about twelve tablets.

This can be very dangerous, especially if ephedrine use is combined with the use of over-the-counter allergy, cough or cold medicines. Tricyclic anti-depressants also react badly with ephedrine. When combined with drugs used to treat digitalis or high blood pressure, ephedrine may increase or decrease the effects of these drugs, with disastrous effects.

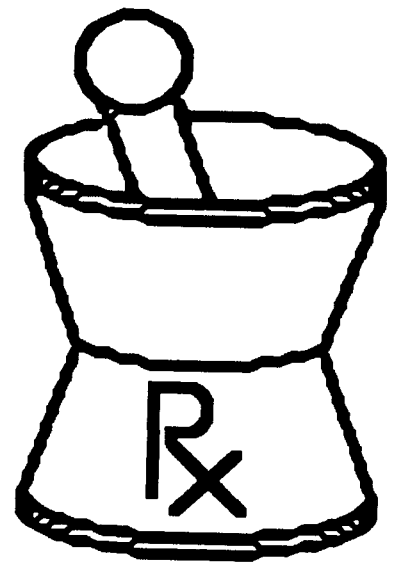
Translation: if you're taking Sudafed for a sinus problem and you start popping ephedrine tablets, you might be okay. On the other hand, you might just wind up in the hospital. Or in the morgue.

In rare cases, a normal dose of ephedrine (one 25mg tablet) has caused a variety of nasty side effects, including headaches, dizziness, and nausea. Some users have also reported rapid heartbeat, chest discomfort, sweating, and painful urination when using ephedrine at low doses.

A moderate overdose of ephedrine may cause the effects listed directly above, while a large overdose will likely cause some combination of: anxiety, confusion, delirium, muscle tremors, and rapid and irregular pulse.

Because these overdose symptoms closely resemble feelings normally experienced by students

during finals week, they may be overlooked. All joking aside, however, even though many ephedrine users never experience any negative side effects, the potential for a bad reaction does



exist, especially when ephedrine is combined with other drugs.

Medical literature categorizes ephedrine as non habit-forming. In fact, the regular use of ephedrine for more than three or four days causes a temporary tolerance to the drug, which disappears after several days of non-usage. That is not to say, though, that ephedrine cannot be abused. When drug use - legal or otherwise - replaces rest on a regular basis, there is a problem.

Using stimulants as a substitute for sleep is never a great idea, and misusing ephedrine is illegal. Your best bet, of course, is to pace your studying, and to get enough sleep. But if you feel you do need something to keep you awake as you study for finals, you should probably stick to the stand-bys, coffee and sugar. They're mild, and they're completely legal.

I am not condoning the use of ephedrine as a stimulant, but if you feel you must use this drug, despite the possible consequences, you would be well advised to take a low dosage and not to mix it with other drugs.

The medical information found in this article comes from *The Essential Guide to Prescription Drugs*, by James W. Long, M.D.

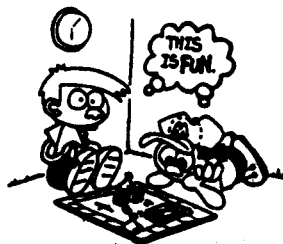
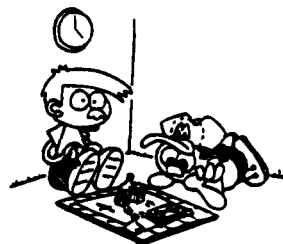
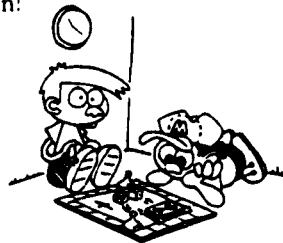
the CULTURAL IDIOCY QUIZ

by Rich Dahm and Dan Vebber

Spin Again, or Lose a Turn

DIRECTIONS: Following are the descriptions of 20 games. Name the games—and win!

- Put hotels on large portions of Atlantic City.
- Remove plastic organs with tweezers.
- Fit geometric shapes into holes before "plunger" pops up.
- Roll dice and assemble an insect.
- Satiate water cows craving for marbles.
- Make way through confectionery landmarks.
- Get a job, have kids, and drive a car.
- Gyrate on a mat with colored dots, but don't fall down.
- Shout out a letter and a number and hope for a Hit, not a Miss.
- Press levers to get all your balls on your opponent's side.
- Keep the kid from falling into the frozen pond.
- It's like Tiddly Winks with insects and trousers.
- Hook together a long string of simians.
- Do good things and climb up, do bad things and slide down.
- Basis for bad movie with multiple endings.
- Open the door and hope you don't end up with a geek.
- Flip small plastic disks into giant rotating orifice.
- Build a Rube-Goldbergesque contraption to catch a rodent.
- Throw beanbags at Tic-Tac-Toe board.
- Land on another person's piece to send them back home, then maniacally press the Pop-O-Matic bubble.



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- CULTURAL IDIOCY QUIZ ANSWERS**
- Monopoly
 - Operation
 - Perfection
 - Cootie
 - Hungry Hungry Hippos
 - Candy Land
 - (The Game of) Life
 - Twister
 - Bartleship
 - Onip Cnup
 - Don't Break the Ice
 - Ants In The Pants
 - Barrel of Monkeys
 - Chutes and Ladders
 - Clue
 - Mystery Date
 - Mr. Mouth
 - Mousetrap
 - Toss Across
 - Trouble

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