



ADDICTION SCIENCE SERIES

CAPTAGON (FENETHYLLINE)



Captagon pills are displayed along with a cup containing cocaine at an office of the Lebanese Internal Security Forces, Anti-Narcotics Division, in Beirut in 2010. (Joseph Eid/AFP/Getty Images/File)

Fenethylamine (British Approved Name/United States Adopted Name) is also spelled phenethylamine and fenethylamine (International Non-Proprietary Name), and is additionally known as amphetaminoethyltheophylline and amfetamine. It is marketed for use as a psychostimulant under the brand names Captagon, Biocapton, and Fitton. It was first synthesized by the German Degussa AG in 1961 and used for around 25 years as a milder alternative to amphetamine and related compounds. Although there are no FDA-approved indications for fenethylamine, it was used in the treatment of "hyperkinetic children" (what would now be referred to as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) and, less commonly, for narcolepsy and depression. One of the main advantages of fenethylamine was that it does not increase blood pressure as significantly as amphetamine and so could be used in patients with cardiovascular conditions. Fenethylamine was considered to have fewer side effects and less potential for abuse than amphetamine, but in 1981 was listed in Schedule I of the U.S. Controlled Substances Act. It became illegal in most countries in 1986 after being listed by the World Health Organization for international scheduling under the Convention on Psychotropic Substances.

Fenethylamine is metabolized by the body to form two drugs: amphetamine and theophylline. The physiological effects of fenethylamine result from a combination of these two substances. It is a popular drug in Western Asia, allegedly used by Islamic militant groups in Syria. It is manufactured non-pharmaceutically, and sells for between and \$9 and \$20 per tablet. The precise origin of Captagon is unclear, with some reports indicating the Islamic



militant groups in Syria exchange the drug for weapons and cash, while other sources insist that only the Syrian government would have the sophisticated and large scale manufacturing processes to produce large volumes of Captagon. In June of 2020, Italian police intercepted 14 tons of Captagon tablets hidden in heavy machinery and bound for the European drug market.