What is ecstasy (MDMA)?

'Ecstasy' was originally a brand name for methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA). In recent years, the composition of tablets, or sometimes powder, sold as ecstasy has changed. Ecstasy tablets may contain a variety of substances which, when combined, give effects similar to MDMA. Because the components vary, the effects of different batches of ecstasy are unpredictable.

This fact sheet summarises the effects of ecstasy containing MDMA, but readers need to be aware that tablets sold as ecstasy in South Australia often contain methamphetamine (see Amphetamine fact sheet in this series), caffeine, ketamine and other unknown substances.

Effects

Duration

Ecstasy is usually swallowed. Effects occur within 20 minutes and last for several hours.

Single use

> feeling of euphoria
> feelings of closeness with other people
> confidence and lack of inhibitions
> increased blood pressure and heart rate
> nausea
> jaw clenching and grinding teeth.

After-effects

Ecstasy has a hangover effect, which can include:

> loss of appetite
> insomnia
> depression
> muscle aches
> difficulty concentrating
> depression
> anxiety disorders
> inability to think clearly.

Adverse effects

Adverse effects of ecstasy can be fatal. It is important to seek urgent medical assistance for anyone having a bad reaction to ecstasy.

The nature and severity of any adverse effects depends on:

> the setting in which use occurs (ie: alone or with others, at home or at a party, etc)
> individual reaction to ecstasy
> the amount used
> use of other drugs at the same time.

Overdose

Overdose is most likely to occur if ecstasy is combined with:

> other drug use
> a hot environment (ie: a nightclub)
> physical activity (ie: dancing)
> not drinking enough or drinking too much water.

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Dependence

Dependence is when a drug causes physical and psychological changes in a person, leading to them spending a lot of time thinking about, obtaining and using drugs, and recovering from the effects.

Ecstasy is typically used on and off; for example at weekends in conjunction with social activities. As a result, physical dependence is less common, although it is possible.

Ecstasy and the law

It is illegal to make, keep, use, sell or give away ecstasy.

Under the section 47 of the *Road Traffic Act 1961*, it is an offence to drive or attempt to drive a motor vehicle under the influence of a drug. Drugs in your system make driving extremely dangerous because they impair coordination, reduce reaction time, and affect your vision and ability to judge distance and speed.

For more information about ecstasy and the law, visit the 'Illicit drug laws' section of www.sahealth.sa.gov.au.

Further information

Visit the 'Reducing the risk' section of www.sahealth.sa.gov.au for more information about drug use.

For more information

Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS)
Phone: 1300 13 1340
Confidential telephone counselling and information available between 8.30am and 10pm every day.

Drug and Alcohol Services South Australia
161 Greenhill Road, Parkside SA 5063
Phone: (08) 8274 3333 www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/dassa
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