

What is ecstasy (MDMA)?

'Ecstasy' was originally a brand name for methylenedioxyamphetamine (MDMA), which is a stimulant that increases brain activity. Its chemical structure is similar to methamphetamine and the hallucinogen mescaline. Ecstasy is usually swallowed in tablet or capsule form but is also available as a powder and crystalline form, which is snorted or smoked. Injecting ecstasy is not common and is more dangerous.

The composition of drugs sold as ecstasy varies and does not always contain MDMA. They may contain a variety of other substances which, when combined, give effects similar to MDMA. Due to the variation of components in these drugs, the effects of different batches of drugs sold as 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 can often contain stimulants such as ethylone and caffeine, and the anaesthetic drug ketamine and other unknown substances.

Effects

During use

The effects felt during use can be both desired and undesired. For most users, the desired effects are intense excitement and happiness, increased confidence, reduced inhibitions and feelings of closeness with other people. They effects can last between 3 and 6 hours in total, with a come up typically lasting 30-60 minutes. People often report an unpleasant come down as the effects of MDMA wear off. This can include feelings of sadness, a sense of loss and an urge to repeat the experience. It is common to feel extremely drained the day after taking MDMA and people can feel slightly depressed. Typically beginning on the second day following MDMA use. This can last for up to 5 days (or weeks depending on the dosage and the frequency of use).

Harmful effects

Harmful effects during use are generally associated with overdose and can be fatal. The nature and severity of any adverse effects depends on:

- > where use occurs (i.e.: 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.

It is important to be mindful of body temperature, hydration, and electrolytes while on MDMA. Since MDMA suppresses your appetite, eating before the experience is important. Staying hydrated throughout the experience and not drinking too much water.

Overdose - what to look out for

Someone has experienced an overdose if they suffer a medical emergency as a result of accidentally or intentionally using a larger amount of a drug than normal. Ecstasy overdose is most likely to occur if use is combined with:

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

Noticeable signs you or someone else is experiencing an ecstasy overdose can include:

- > high blood pressure
- > fast heart rate
- > increased body temperature (fever)
- > confusion
- > muscle twitching
- > nausea (feeling sick)
- > jaw clenching and grinding teeth
- > serotonin syndrome.

MDMA causes an increase in the concentration of multiple neurotransmitters in the brain, such as serotonin, norepinephrine and dopamine, but many of its subjective effects are caused by the release of massive amounts of serotonin.

Serotonin syndrome is a potentially life-threatening condition resulting from too much serotonin in the brain, which can be triggered by high doses of MDMA. Taking MDMA alongside the other drugs that increase serotonin greatly increases the risk of serotonin syndrome. This includes monoamine oxidase inhibitors (a type of antidepressant), tramadol, dextromethorphan (DXM) and possibly some supplements.

If someone is experiencing any of the above signs, phone 000 immediately for emergency medical attention. Police will not attend unless the ambulance officers call for help or a death occurs.

After-effects of use

Ecstasy has a hangover effect, which can include:

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

Effects of long-term use

While there has been little research on the long-term harms of ecstasy use, studies suggest some of the issues may include:

- > difficulty regulating mood, body temperature, appetite and sex drive
- > liver damage
- > delusions (false beliefs)
- > panic attacks
- > depression
- > hallucinogen persisting perception disorder (HPPD) - the user feels disconnected from his or her body, experiences flashbacks, and has visual problems.

Duration of effects during use

Effects vary depending on route of administration.

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.

in conjunction with social activities. As a result, physical dependence is less common, although it is possible.

Reducing the risk

It is always safer not to use drugs, but there are ways to reduce the risk.

- > Due to the wide variations in the contents, contaminants and dosage of drugs sold as ecstasy, it is important to use as little as possible.
- > Take frequent rests and stay cool and hydrated to keep body temperature down.
- > Avoid using other drugs.
- > Don't use alone.
- > Injecting ecstasy pills can be very dangerous as the pills do not dissolve well and can block blood vessels if injected causing scarring and bruising, and may lead to blood clots or the loss of a limb. There is also the risk of infections and blood borne virus transmission such as hepatitis C, hepatitis B and HIV.
- > If injecting, always use clean injecting equipment, use a clean pill filter and dispose of all equipment safely. There are Clean Needle Programs throughout South Australia where sterile injecting equipment, health information and referrals can be accessed for free.
- > Visit www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/dassa for more information.

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 SA Health website www.sahealth.sa.gov.au > Health topics > Legal matters > Scroll to: Illicit drug laws.

Further information

Risks of using drugs - visit www.sahealth.sa.gov.au > Healthy Living > Is your health at risk? > Scroll to: The risks of using drugs.

Phone the Alcohol and Drug Information Services (ADIS) on 1300 13 1340 between 8.30am to 10pm for confidential telephone counselling, information and referral.

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.

www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/dassa

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