

Ecstasy

What is ecstasy?

Please note that drugs sold as ecstasy may not contain any methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA); they can be a mix of amphetamine, paramethoxyamphetamine (PMA), ketamine, NBOMe, methylone or other substances.

Ecstasy is a stimulant drug, which means it speeds up the messages travelling between the brain and body.

Ecstasy contains the drug MDMA. However, many pills sold as ecstasy only have a small amount of MDMA or none at all. Other drugs and 'fillers' like household cleaning products are often used instead. This makes it hard to know what reactions to expect after taking ecstasy or how bad the side effects will be.

Other names

Eckies, E, XTC, pills, pingers, bikkies, flippers, molly.

How is ecstasy used?

Ecstasy comes in a tablet form and is usually swallowed. The pills come in different colours and sizes and are often imprinted with a picture or symbol. It can also come as capsules, powder or crystal/rock.

Effects of ecstasy

There is no safe level of drug use. Use of any drug always carries some risk. It's important to be careful when taking any type of drug.

Ecstasy affects everyone differently, based on:

- Size, weight and health
- Whether the person is used to taking it
- Whether other drugs are taken around the same time
- The amount taken
- The strength of the drug (varies from batch to batch)

The effects of ecstasy are usually felt about 20 minutes to an hour after it's taken and last for around 6 hours.

The following effects may be experienced:

- Feeling happy, energetic and confident
- Large pupils
- Jaw clenching and teeth grinding
- Heightened senses (sight, hearing and touch)
- Excessive sweating and skin tingles
- Muscle aches and pains
- Nausea and reduced appetite
- Fast heartbeat
- Dehydration
- Heat stroke
- Drinking extreme amounts of water (can cause death)

If a large amount or a strong batch of ecstasy is consumed the following may also be experienced:

- Floating sensations
- Hallucinations
- Out-of-character irrational behaviour
- Anxiety
- Irritability, paranoia and violence
- Vomiting
- High body temperature
- Racing heart beat
- Fitting

Coming down

In the days after ecstasy use, the following may be experienced:

- Restless sleep and exhaustion
- Anxiety, irritability and depression
- Difficulty concentrating

The use of depressant drugs such as alcohol, benzodiazepines or cannabis to help with these 'come down' effects, may result in dependence on both types of drugs.

Long term effects

Regular use of a lot of ecstasy may eventually cause:

- Colds or flu
- Depression
- Needing to use more to get the same effect
- Dependence on ecstasy
- Financial, work and social problems

Mixing ecstasy with other drugs

The effects of taking ecstasy with other drugs – including over-the-counter or prescribed medications – can be unpredictable and dangerous, and could cause:

Ecstasy + alcohol: increased risk of dehydration and consequently drinking too much water.

Ecstasy + ice or speed: increased risk of anxiety and reduced brain functioning due to dopamine depletion. Enormous strain on the heart and other parts of the body, which can lead to stroke.

Ecstasy + antidepressants: Drowsiness, clumsiness, restlessness and feeling drunk and dizzy.

Health and safety

The use of any drug carries a risk of harm. This risks associated with using ecstasy are increased when:

- Large amounts are taken, for example a whole pill at once.
- It's used with alcohol or other drugs including prescribed or over-the-counter medications.

- Ecstasy is taken when there's no one around such as a good friend who can help if things start going wrong or in an emergency.
- Too much water is drunk (more than 600ml per hour) due to dancing or doing other activities vigorously or for too long. It's possible to 'drown' the brain by drinking too much water. It's also possible to overheat from doing these activities so drinking water is important.
- Driving, swimming, operating machinery or being involved with other risky activities while under the influence of ecstasy or 'coming down' from it, which can take several days.

Withdrawal

Giving up ecstasy after using it for a long time is challenging because the body has to get used to functioning without it. Withdrawal symptoms should settle down after a week and will mostly disappear after a month. Symptoms include:

- Cravings for ecstasy
- Aches and pains
- Exhaustion
- Restless sleep
- Agitation
- Trouble concentrating
- Anxiety and depression

Further Information

The Druginfo website has information on:

- Treatment
- The law
- Help and support
- References for this fact sheet

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