

ECSTASY: THE FACTS

WHAT IS ECSTASY?

Methylene DioxyMethAmphetamine (MDMA) – usually called ecstasy – is a drug made from different chemicals. It contains both amphetamines and some hallucinogens. Amphetamines are stimulant drugs which mean they speed up the brain and the central nervous system. Hallucinogens are drugs that can cause people to see, hear, feel or smell things that are different to reality or do not exist (to have hallucinations).

Other names for ecstasy include E, XTC, eccy.

FORMS OF ECSTASY

Ecstasy is made illegally and is sold as small tablets in various sizes and colours. It can also come in powder form to be inhaled through the nose (snorted).

People who make ecstasy often mix or cut the substance with other things to make the drug go further. Some substances in the tablet or powder can have unpleasant or harmful effects. It is difficult to tell what the substance actually contains.

EFFECTS OF ECSTASY

The effects of ecstasy depend on:

- how much you take
- your height and weight
- your general health including use of other medications
- your mood
- your past experience with ecstasy
- whether you use ecstasy on its own or with other drugs
- the composition of the drug.

The effects of ecstasy can start within an hour and typically last up to about six hours. Some effects may continue for up to 32 hours.

PHYSICAL EFFECTS

Effects on your body may include:

- your heart beats faster
- your blood pressure rises
- your body temperature rises
- you sweat more
- your body loses moisture (dehydration)
- you grind your teeth or clench your jaw
- you feel sick in the stomach (nausea)
- seizures/convulsions (fitting)
- vomiting.

PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS MAY INCLUDE

- feel good and confident
- feel close or affectionate to other people
- feel anxious
- feel paranoid (fear that others want to hurt you).
- see, smell, hear or feel things that are different to reality or are not there (have hallucinations)

- lowered inhibitions/altered judgement which could lead to risky behaviours
- feel as though you are floating
- behave strangely – do or say things you normally would not
- impair your capacity as a parent/primary carer of children.

HANGOVER EFFECT

There is some evidence that you can have a hangover effect after the effects of ecstasy have worn off. Symptoms of this include:

- reduced appetite
- disturbed sleep
- feeling down or emotional
- muscle aches
- finding it hard to concentrate.

LONG TERM EFFECTS

If ecstasy is used in higher doses, the user may experience a risk of developing a mental health disorder such as depression and psychological distress. Long term effects may include damage to some of the body's major organs (liver, heart, brain and lungs).

If you use ecstasy often and for a long time you may also develop a tolerance to the drug. Tolerance means that you must take more of the drug to get the same effects you used to have with smaller amounts. It appears that you feel more unpleasant effects when you use more ecstasy.

ECSTASY RELATED EMERGENCY

If someone is having a seizure, has fever, is agitated and unable to settle or you can't wake them up or you are concerned that they may have sustained a head injury from a drug related fall – call an ambulance immediately – dial Triple Zero (000).

If the person has been mixing ecstasy with other drugs, tell the NSW Ambulance paramedic exactly what they have taken. Paramedics are there to help. Generally paramedics don't involve the police **unless** there is danger to themselves or other people/children, someone dies, or a crime (such as violence or theft) has been committed.

OVERDOSE AND BAD REACTIONS

Overdose of ecstasy can happen to anyone. When a person overdoses, it may cause:

- very high blood pressure
- fast heartbeat
- very high body temperature
- seizures.

Some people have died after having a very bad reaction to ecstasy. These deaths are often caused by the body overheating and dehydrating.

Dehydration can be prevented by drinking enough of water. Doctors recommend that you drink 500ml per hour if you are moving around (eg dancing), and 250ml per hour if you are not moving around. Some deaths have occurred by over-hydration (i.e. drinking too much water).

MIXING WITH OTHER DRUGS

People who use ecstasy sometimes take other drugs at the same time. Sometimes they do this to increase the pleasurable effects. Sometimes they use other drugs at the same time to cope with some of the things ecstasy does to the body. Some people take drugs such as tranquillisers, alcohol or marijuana to help them sleep.

Taking ecstasy with other drugs such as speed or LSD can cause a psychotic reaction (psychosis – a serious psychological problem where you hear voices, imagine things, or fear that others want to hurt you). Taking ecstasy and alcohol raises blood pressure and body temperature and increases the chance of dehydration.

PREGNANCY AND BREASTFEEDING

It is best not to use any drugs during pregnancy. Most drugs have some effect on the unborn baby if the mother uses them while pregnant.

It is possible that using ecstasy when pregnant increases the risk of miscarriage. The use of amphetamine-like substances such as ecstasy during pregnancy has also been associated with delayed development and subtle abnormalities in newborn babies. Inform antenatal staff of ecstasy use and attend regular antenatal checkups.

It is possible that if a mother uses ecstasy while breastfeeding the drug will be present in her milk, and may have adverse effects on the baby.

It is generally risky to take any drug while breastfeeding without medical advice.

DRIVING UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF ECSTASY

Ecstasy can make you feel more confident when you drive. This can make you take dangerous risks and have accidents. It is illegal to drive under the influence of drugs, including ecstasy as you could lose your licence for a set time or be fined.

Anyone under the influence of ecstasy who kills or injures another person while driving can be sentenced to a term in prison.

THE LAW

Using ecstasy is illegal. If you use, sell or give ecstasy to someone else and get caught, you could face substantial fines and penalties including a prison sentence.

SELF-HELP ASSOCIATIONS

Narcotics Anonymous Australia is a non profit organisation to help people abstain from drugs. Visit www.na.org.au

Smart Recovery is a voluntary self-help group that assists people in recovering from alcohol, drug use and other addictive behaviours. Visit www.smartrecoveryaustralia.com.au

INFORMATION AND ADVICE

For free and confidential advice about alcohol and other drugs 24 hours, 7 days a week, call the **National Alcohol and Other Drug hotline: 1800 250 015**. It will automatically direct you to the Alcohol and Drug Information Service in the state or territory you are calling from.

Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council provides links to Aboriginal community controlled health services across NSW. Visit www.ahmrc.org.au for information about AHMRC members including a regional map, information and links to members websites.

Drug and Alcohol Multicultural Education Centre (DAMEC) provides services for people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Contact DAMEC on (02) 8113 1301 or for counselling and support services for CALD communities call (02) 8706 0150.

Drug Info provides facts and resources on alcohol and other drugs and the prevention of related harm. Visit www.druginfo.adf.org.au

State Library of New South Wales Drug Info provides up to date information on alcohol and other drugs in public libraries throughout NSW. Visit www.druginfo.sl.nsw.gov.au

eheadspace provides mental health and wellbeing support, information and services for young people (12 – 25 years) and their family and friends. Visit www.eheadspace.org.au

Family Drug Support provides 24-7 telephone support to families in crisis due to drug and alcohol issues. Call the Helpline on 1300 368 186 or visit www.fds.org.au

Kids Helpline is a free, 24 hour counselling service for young people aged 5 to 25 years. Counselling is offered via the Kids Helpline website www.kidshelp.com.au or email, or call 1800 55 1800.

Nepean Youth Drug and Alcohol Service (NYDAS) works within a holistic model of care to address a range of issues for young people (12 – 20 years of age) related to their alcohol and other drug use. Call (02) 4734 2129 or (02) 4734 1333.

NSW Users and AIDS Association (NUAA) is a peak drug user organisation in NSW providing harm reduction information and blood borne virus prevention peer education. Visit www.nuaa.org.au

Poisons Information Centre is a 24/7 call centre service available across Australia. Call 13 11 26.

ReachOut is an Australian online youth mental health service with a mobile-friendly site and forums where you can access help, information and support. Visit au.reachout.com

Sexual Health Info Link provides free and confidential sexual health support and information. Visit www.shil.nsw.gov.au

TAFE NSW provides help with education, career development or personal matters. Students can contact a local TAFE/university counsellor. Visit www.tafensw.edu.au

Youth Action is the peak organisation for young people in NSW. Visit www.youthaction.org.au and use the search option to access a directory of NSW youth services.

Youth Solutions provides services for young people 12 to 25 years of age and the community including prevention and health promotion, drug and alcohol education, community programs and information and referral. Visit www.youthsolutions.com.au or call (02) 4628 2319 [provides services to young people in Macarthur and Wingecarribee].

NSW Health aims to reduce drug-related harm for individuals and the community by providing the facts, including the possible health, social and economic consequences of using alcohol and other drugs.

