

HALLUCINOGENS: THE FACTS

WHAT ARE HALLUCINOGENS?

Hallucinogens are a group of drugs that work on the brain to affect the senses and cause hallucinations – seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting or touching things that do not exist. Hallucinogens are sometimes called psychedelic drugs, trips, magic mushrooms, LSD or acid.

FORMS OF HALLUCINOGENS

Some hallucinogens occur naturally in trees, vines, seeds, fungi (eg psilocybin or magic mushrooms) and leaves. Others are made in laboratories by mixing different chemical substances (trips, LSD, acid). Some drugs, such as cannabis and ecstasy, can cause hallucinogen-like effects when used in high doses or in certain ways. Using hallucinogens is often called tripping.

Lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD)

LSD (acid, trips) is the most often used form of hallucinogen. In its pure form LSD is a white, odourless powder.

This pure form is very strong, so LSD is usually mixed with other non-hallucinogenic substances to increase the bulk. It comes in liquid form, tablets, capsules or squares of gelatine or blotting paper.

Psilocybin

Psilocybin (magic mushrooms) is the hallucinogenic chemical that occurs in some mushrooms. Psilocybin is usually sold as dried mushrooms or in substances made from mushrooms. Psilocybin is from the same chemical family as LSD so its effects are similar. Some people eat poisonous mushrooms thinking they are mushrooms containing psilocybin. This can be very dangerous as some poisonous mushrooms can cause death or permanent kidney or liver damage. It is dangerous to eat wild mushrooms.

Other forms of hallucinogen that occur naturally include DMT (dimethyltryptamine), datura and mescaline (peyote cactus).

MIXING WITH OTHER DRUGS

The effects of mixing hallucinogens with other drugs, including alcohol, prescription medicines and over the counter medicines are often unpredictable and dangerous. Mixing hallucinogens with stimulant drugs (such as cocaine or amphetamines) increases the stimulant effects and can further increase the heart rate, place the body under extreme stress and can lead to stroke. Combining hallucinogens with depressant drugs such as alcohol may further reduce coordination and increase the chances and risks of vomiting.

EFFECTS OF HALLUCINOGENS

What hallucinogens do to you depends on:

- how much you take
- your height and weight
- your general health
- your mood
- your mental health
- your past experience with hallucinogens
- whether you use hallucinogens on their own or with other drugs
- whether you use alone or with others, at home or at a party, etc.

The effects of hallucinogens are not easy to predict and may be different for different people and at different times. It may impair your capacity as a parent/primary carer of children.

The main effects of hallucinogens are changes in the way you perceive things with your senses. They can include strange sensations such as floating or your body becoming part of another object. Some people find such unusual sensations interesting and pleasant, while to others these same effects are unpleasant and disturbing.

IMMEDIATE EFFECTS

The effects of hallucinogens begin within half an hour of taking the drug, are strongest in three to five hours, and last for up to 12 hours.

Psychological Effects may include:

- seeing, hearing, touching or smelling things in a distorted way, or that don't exist (you usually know that what you are sensing is not real)
- intense sensory experiences (eg colours become very bright, sounds become sharper)
- mixing of the senses (eg you hear colours or see sounds)

- changed sense of time (eg minutes can seem as slow as hours, or you can re-live something that happened a long time ago)
- space becomes distorted
- strange bodily sensations (eg as though you are floating or being pulled down by gravity, or that you are becoming part of another object)
- changed and intense thoughts
- emotional swings (eg change from intense happiness to deep sadness).

Physical Effects may include:

- muscles twitching
- feeling weak
- increased body temperature, sweating or chills
- feeling numb
- pupils get bigger
- shaking
- feeling sick or vomiting
- heart beats faster
- blood pressure rising
- breathing faster and deeper than normal
- poor coordination.

BAD TRIPS

Sometimes the effects of hallucinogens are mostly negative. This is called a bad trip and it is common among first time users. Effects of a bad trip can include:

- confused, extreme anxiety or fear
- frightening hallucinations (eg spiders crawling on the skin)
- panic, leading to taking risks (eg running across a busy street)
- feelings of losing control or going mad
- paranoia (feeling that other people want to harm you)
- suicide or violence (rare).

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EFFECTS OF HALLUCINOGENS

If someone you know is having a bad trip, they need to be reassured, comforted and kept safe until the effects of the drug wear off. This can take many hours and may not disappear altogether for some days.

RISKY BEHAVIOUR

People can do dangerous things while affected by trips (eg. walk in front of a car, jump off a balcony).

LONG TERM EFFECTS

There are few known long term effects from hallucinogens. However, flashbacks – times when you feel the effects of the drug again – can happen days, weeks or even years after taking the drug. Flashbacks can include visual hallucinations and other effects. They can happen without warning, last for a minute or two and can be disturbing.

Flashbacks may be triggered by using other drugs or by stress, tiredness or physical exercise. Regular users are more likely to experience flashbacks than people who only use the drug from time to time.

Some other long term effects of hallucinogens may be damaged memory and concentration. Using hallucinogens may increase the risk of mental health issues in some people, such as depression, psychosis, personality disruption and post hallucinogen perception disorder.

TOLERANCE AND DEPENDENCE

Anyone can develop a tolerance to hallucinogens. Tolerance means that you must take more of the drug to feel the same effects you used to have with smaller amounts. With hallucinogens this happens very quickly. Being tolerant to one kind of hallucinogen (eg LSD) can also make you tolerant to other kinds (eg magic mushrooms). Tolerance goes away when you stop using the drug regularly.

Dependence means that a drug takes up a lot of your thoughts, emotions and activities. Regular users may experience a need or craving if they stop taking the drug.

PREGNANCY AND BREASTFEEDING

There is some evidence linking the use of hallucinogens in pregnancy to an increased risk of miscarriage and birth complications. There may also be a higher incidence of birth defects among babies born to women using hallucinogens. If you are using Hallucinogens regularly, do not stop suddenly inform antenatal staff of hallucinogen use and attend regular antenatal checkups.

If a mother uses hallucinogens while breastfeeding, it is possible that the drug will be present in her milk and have adverse effects on the baby.

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

HALLUCINOGEN RELATED EMERGENCY

If you can't wake someone up, they are having abdominal pain, seizures, hyperthermia, muscle stiffness and hypertension or are paranoid and unable to settle with reassurance, 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 hallucinogens 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.

THE LAW

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

DRIVING UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF HALLUCINOGENS



Hallucinogens change the way you see, hear, touch and experience other sensations, making it very dangerous to drive. It is illegal to drive under the influence of drugs, including hallucinogens. Penalties include losing your licence, a fine and/or jail.

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

SELF-HELP ASSOCIATIONS

Narcotics Anonymous Australia, is a non profit fellowship or society of recovering addicts who meet regularly to help each other stay clean via a program of complete abstinence from all drugs. 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.

Your room provides drug and alcohol information and advice, campaigns and resources. Visit www.yourroom.com.au

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 Poisons Information Centre provides the latest poisons information to the public, and toxicology advice to health professionals on the management of poisoned and envenomed patients. Telephone advice is available 24/7 on **131126** from anywhere in Australia.

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

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 & 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.

A range of drug and alcohol fact sheets is available for download at: www.yourroom.com.au

