

Contacts

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Psychedelics

Common Names

Psychedelics are also known as hallucinogens. These are a group of drugs that can change a person's perception, so that they see or hear things that are distorted or that don't exist.

They include:

- Psilocybin found in certain mushrooms called 'magic mushrooms'
- Mescaline from the peyote cactus
- LSD also commonly known as 'acid'

History of the drug

Natural hallucinogens in plants have been used for centuries by various cultures for their mystical and spiritual associations. People pick mushroom plant varieties such as "gold tops" and then cook them or eat them as they would normal mushrooms. Synthetic psychedelics were developed in the twentieth century, becoming popular in the 1960's and early 1970's. It is illegal to use, possess or supply any hallucinogenic drug. In NSW penalties apply such as expensive fines and/or imprisonment.

Forms of the drug

Some psychedelics occur naturally in plant species, whilst others are manufactured in laboratories. They vary widely in their origin and chemical composition.

LSD is odourless, white and tasteless. It is usually soaked into decorated small squares of absorbent paper and taken orally. Each square represents one dose.

Drug effects

Psychedelics can produce changes in thought, sense of time and mood.

The psychedelic experience, or 'tripping' as it is often called, will vary from person to person. The effects can range from feeling good to an intensely unpleasant experience commonly known as a 'bad trip'.

Bad trips can produce feelings of anxiety, fear or losing control. Other effects are a sense of time passing slowly, feelings of unreality, feelings of separation from the body and an inability to

concentrate. Intense sensory experiences, such as brighter colours, and a mixing of the senses, such as hearing colours may also be felt. Both positive and negative feelings may be felt during the same drug experience.

Effects of psychedelics usually begin within half an hour and are at their strongest in 3 to 5 hours but may be felt for up to 16 hours.

Physical effects include:

- A common perception of being able to 'hear' sights and 'see' smells
- Headaches, dizziness
- Restlessness, anxiety and sometimes even violent behaviour

Chemically LSD is very similar to that of the neurotransmitter 'serotonin', and the effect of the drug is to increase sensory information delivery into the brain, thus essentially flooding it with an excess of sensation. Other effects may include:

- Loss of concentration
- 'Out of body' experiences

Blind subjects who take LSD in experimental situations do not experience any visual illusions at all. 'Hallucinations' are usually warped visual exaggerations of 'what is actually present', and should be more properly referred to as 'illusions'.

Risks and harms

LSD can cause an abnormally rapid beating of the heart and rise in blood pressure, and can pose a risk for those with cardiac problems.

Some users experience unpredictable 'flashbacks' where they relive the effects of the drug without actually using it. These can sometimes occur years after the 'trip', but usually this occur within the first year.

Depression is also common following tripping. There is also evidence that existing mental illnesses such as psychosis, depression and anxiety can be triggered or made very much worse by LSD.

Fatalities or accidents can occur as a result of 'tripping' in unsafe environments, as a result of people believing they can fly, or 'freaking out' during a bad trip, for example near water or bridges. People should never take LSD or other psychedelics alone, and one person should always remain 'straight' to deal with any problems that may arise.

Collecting and consuming wild 'magic mushrooms' can also be risky, as there is a high risk of even experienced users accidentally eating a poisonous toadstool or species of mushroom.

Dependency

Psychedelics are rarely used daily or regularly but when they are, tolerance develops quickly. Tolerance means that higher amounts need to be taken to get the same effect as before. Some regular users may develop a psychological dependence.

Danger signs

Call an ambulance immediately if a person whilst 'tripping' has:

- Heart palpitations, shortness of breath, wheezing, fitting, blurred vision or collapses into unconsciousness after taking LSD or another psychedelic
- Passed out or becomes unable to speak or move. If they are still breathing and have a pulse, lie them on their side while waiting for the ambulance
- No pulse and is not breathing commence CPR (Cardio-Pulmonary Resuscitation) immediately and wait for the ambulance
- A pulse but NO BREATHING commence mouth-to-mouth resuscitation ONLY

Withdrawal

There do not appear to be physical symptoms associated with withdrawal from psychedelics. Counselling may assist people who experience psychological dependence problems.

Detox and treatment

Phone ADIS for details of services able to provide advice and support.

Your local health service will also be able to advise of local services.

See **FACT SHEET No.1 Contacts**.