

facts

Withdrawal

Phone ADIS for details about withdrawal and support options see **FACT SHEET No.1 Contacts.**

Detox and treatment

Phone ADIS for details of services able to provide treatment and support options see **FACT SHEET No.1 Contacts.**

Other party drugs

Other party drugs are Ketamine (Special K) and PCP (Angel Dust): These are anaesthetics with hallucinogenic effects. Apart from adverse reactions similar to those described for ecstasy, the main concern with Special K is the risk of being injured as it blocks out pain. Ketamine is sometimes sold as ecstasy or mixed with ecstasy.

GHB (also known as GBH, Fantasy, Liquid E, or Liquid X) is also an anaesthetic. At low doses it induces a feeling of calm, relaxation and mild euphoria. At high doses it can cause sedation, nausea, vomiting, muscle stiffness, confusion, convulsions and in some cases coma or respiratory collapse. A number of fatalities in the US have been attributed to GHB.

Contacts

For more information contact 1300 368 186

Family Drug Support

PO Box 226

Willoughby NSW 2068

Phone (02) 9798 0001

Fax (02) 9798 0005

www.fds.org.au



facts



Ecstasy and other party drugs

Common Names

Ecstasy is the common name for Methylene Dioxy Meth Amphetamine, or MDMA.

Street or slang names include: Ecky, E's.



History of the drug

Ecstasy is known as the 'party or love drug' and commonly makes users feel warm and loving, even towards people they may not know well. Ecstasy is a central nervous system stimulant primarily used as a party drug. Its euphoric, mood-altering effects make it a popular stimulant for dancing and partying.

Forms of the drug

Ecstasy is a synthetic drug usually sold as small tablets in a variety of colours and sizes. It also comes in capsule form or as powder and can be snorted or injected. Injecting ecstasy is becoming more common, and is risky because of the impurities present and the unpredictable composition of the tabs or capsules. Injecting users also face the risk of contracting infectious diseases such as Hepatitis C and HIV (AIDS) - See **FACT SHEET No.9** for more information. Much of the so called 'ecstasy' sold in Australia is in fact amphetamine.

Drug effects

Ecstasy's effects depend on the amount taken, the person's experience with the drug, their expectations, the mood they are in and the way in which the drug is taken. Effects can also depend on the quality and purity of the drug. Effects start after about an hour and can last up to six hours, but may last as long as 32 hours.

MDMA seems to work by boosting the levels of two brain chemicals:

- **Serotonin** which is the neurotransmitter that creates feelings of well-being and pleasure; and
- **Dopamine** which affects mood and muscle control, and acts as a pain suppressant

Higher doses of ecstasy can produce hallucinations, irrational behaviour, vomiting and convulsions.

Physical effects include:

- **Increased feelings of self confidence, wellbeing, and feeling close to others**
- **A rise in blood pressure; body temperature, pulse rate and sweating,**
- **Jaw clenching and teeth grinding**
- **Dehydration**
- **Nausea and anxiety**
- **A 'hangover' effect on the next day, which makes concentration difficult**
- **Symptoms can include loss of appetite, insomnia, depression and muscle aches**
- **Regular weekend users of ecstasy commonly experience mid-week depression**

Risks and harms

Other drugs are often used with ecstasy as a way of coping with some of its undesirable effects. Little is known about the effects of these combinations but in general, health risks tend to increase when two or more drugs are used together, particularly if the doses are large.

Psychological effects include:

- **Heightened sexual desire and intensification of the sexual experience**
- **Decreased inhibition. For this reason, major risks associated with ecstasy use include having unprotected or unsafe sex**

Serotonin and Dopamine play a part in regulating body temperature. MDMA users may ignore the fact their body is overheating, because the messages of discomfort are prevented from being transmitted. High numbers of heat-related casualties and fatalities associated with the use of ecstasy are due to this effect. This appears to be the most common risk so far that is associated with ecstasy use.

It is important to keep sipping water while on ecstasy. Drinking water does not dilute the effects of ecstasy it only prevents dehydration. However, 'drinking too much water' may lead to brain swelling and irreversible damage in some people.

Warning signs of dehydration or heat stroke.

Danger signs are sudden feelings of being irritable, giddy, feeling faint, cramps in the back of the legs, arms and back, passing little or dark-coloured urine, vomiting, or cessation of sweating. If these occur, tell a friend what's happening and sit down in a cool quiet area and sip fluids such as fruit juice. If the symptoms continue, worsen, or the user or their friends are worried they should immediately call an ambulance or seek medical help.

Dependency

People can develop tolerance to the pleasurable effects of ecstasy. This means that more ecstasy is needed to get the same effects as before. Although unclear whether physical dependence can develop, psychological dependence is a risk.

Those who become accustomed to partying and socialising while on ecstasy may feel unable to communicate, make friends, or enjoy themselves without using MDMA or a similar drug. Counselling and support may help with this dependency.

Extreme reactions to ecstasy are sporadic and impossible to predict and appear unrelated to the amount taken. Reactions depend on a number of uncertain factors and relate to the individual's reaction at that particular time and place.

People who should never use MDMA or similar drugs include those with high blood pressure, a heart condition, diabetes, asthma, epilepsy, depression or other mental illness. Extreme reactions can include convulsions, mental disturbances, blood clotting and kidney failure as well as hyperthermia - all of which can prove fatal. Regular users have also been reported to risk some liver damage. Some people appear to be more susceptible to the ill-effects of ecstasy.

Long-term risks are relatively unknown as yet, and research is continuing. Laboratory research with animals has pointed to the possibilities of long-term brain damage due to destruction of brain cells that produce serotonin and ultimately failure of the brain to produce serotonin. Health professionals have also reported some users continue to have psychiatric problems including delusions, depression, panic attacks, disorientation and depersonalisation. In a few cases, these symptoms have been permanent, or lasted weeks or months.

Danger signs

Call an ambulance immediately if a person has:

- Heart palpitations, shortness of breathe, wheezing, fitting, severe headache, blurred vision or collapses into unconsciousness following the use of ecstasy
- A severe headache and vomiting and they have injected ecstasy. This can indicate serious damage
- 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