

WHAT IT IS

Ecstasy is a slang name for methylenedioxymethamphetamine, or MDMA, which is a designer drug (a synthetic drug made in a laboratory). Ecstasy is also sometimes called E, X, and euphoria. Sometimes referred to as the most popular “club drug” (drugs seen most often at raves or all-night dances and parties), ecstasy is becoming common in other places as well—at house parties, at school dances, or when friends are just “hanging out.” Ecstasy usually comes in tablets or capsules, often with colourful designs or pictures on them.

Ecstasy is a combination of chemicals produced illegally in labs. Often other drugs are sold as ecstasy, so it’s impossible to know what you’re really getting. Some examples of other drugs found in tablets sold as ecstasy are methamphetamine, caffeine, ephedrine, ketamine, PCP, and even cocaine and heroin. These drugs have their own unpredictable and dangerous side effects, and many of them can cause serious damage to your heart and nervous system.

WHAT IT DOES

Ecstasy is a stimulant that makes you feel alert, happy, peaceful, and confident. It can also increase your feelings of affection and love toward other people, which is why it’s sometimes called the “love drug.” These feelings usually last between 3 and 6 hours. Ecstasy can also cause hallucinations, as well as drastically increase your heart rate and blood pressure. Many people who take ecstasy feel anxiety, panic, blurred vision, and nausea.

SHORT-TERM EFFECTS

Ecstasy is a dangerous drug. It can cause hyperthermia, or overheating. This can lead to severe dehydration, which can damage your kidneys and cardiovascular system and lead to death. On the other hand, people who use Ecstasy often experience intense thirst. Drinking too much water can cause dilutional hypothermia, where your brain swells from excess fluid intake, and you fall into a coma. Ecstasy can also cause seizures, and can damage your nervous tissue and nerves, which may cause long-term damage to your memory. The effects of ecstasy can last from one to several days after taking the drug. You may experience insomnia, depression, anxiety, paranoia, fatigue or difficulty concentrating.

LONG-TERM EFFECTS

If you use ecstasy regularly, the chemicals in your brain can be permanently altered. This can affect your moods and sleep patterns. You can also become paranoid, depressed, and irritable, and some people experience flashbacks (hallucinations) long after they stop using the drug. Plus, taking a lot of ecstasy can cause liver damage.

ADDICTION

Right now, there is no conclusive evidence that Ecstasy is physically addictive. However, studies show that it is possible to become psychologically dependent on Ecstasy. This means you may find yourself putting Ecstasy use above friends, family, school, work, and other things in your life that are important to you.

REDUCING THE RISKS

- Avoid dehydration or over-hydration by drinking only a couple of glasses (500 ml) of water every hour.
- When dancing, be sure to take breaks and sit down and rest periodically.
- Don’t take more than one pill, and don’t combine ecstasy with alcohol or any other drugs.
- It’s dangerous to drive a car while on ecstasy.
- People who use ecstasy are less likely to make thoughtful decisions, including decisions about unsafe or unwanted sex.

BET YOU DIDN'T KNOW

The testing kits available to determine if what you're buying is really ecstasy only tell you if any ecstasy is present in the tablet. The tests don't tell you how strong a dose you're taking, or what other chemicals the tablet may contain. So, you may get a false sense of security while still not really knowing what it is you're putting into your body.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- ◇ What is risky about buying any illicit drug?
- ◇ The term "magic bullet" refers to the common belief that some drugs, like ecstasy, have only positive effects. Why is this a dangerous myth?

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