

MDMA (Ecstasy)

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MDMA acts as a stimulant and hallucinogen. It produces an energizing effect, and distorts time and perception.

MDMA is popular among young people at all-night clubs, or raves. MDMA is one of a few drugs known as club drugs. Other club drugs include Rohypnol and GHB (depressants) and ketamine (a tranquilizer).

As a street drug, MDMA is known as “ecstasy,” “E,” “X,” “XTC” and “Scooby snacks,” among others. Street dealers generally sell MDMA as a tablet or capsule that may be swallowed, injected, crushed and snorted, or used in a suppository form.

Many ecstasy tablets contain other drugs including methamphetamine, caffeine, dextromethorphan (an over-the-counter cough medicine), mescaline (taken from the peyote cactus), ephedrine and cocaine. Users may take the drug with other substances such as alcohol and marijuana.

Addiction

MDMA can be addictive. It affects the brain by changing the brain chemicals which allow the nerve cells to communicate with each other. When taken in high doses, MDMA can affect body temperature, causing liver, kidney and heart failure.

Effects of MDMA Use

Effects begin within 1 hour of taking a single dose and can last up to 6 hours. Effects may include:

- feelings of mental stimulation
- emotional warmth
- empathy
- general sense of well-being
- decreased anxiety.

While under the influence of the drug, the user is at increased danger while doing complex or skilled activities such as driving because of reduced senses, memory, judgment and coordination. The effects can last well beyond 6 hours.

- MDMA continues to reduce mental abilities up to 1 week.
- The drug can cause confusion, depression, anxiety, restlessness, irritability, paranoia and sleep problems for weeks.
- MDMA can cause permanent damage to the brain’s ability to think and store memories.

Problems (Complications)

MDMA can cause:

- short-term memory problems
- loss of coordination, dizziness, fainting
- upset stomach (nausea), chills, sweating and teeth clenching
- depression
- severe anxiety
- confusion
- sleep problems
- increased heart rate and blood pressure
- severe breathing problems, coma or death (in higher doses).

Because users take this drug to dance for long periods of time — often in hot, crowded clubs — MDMA can lead to a rise in body temperature, extreme dehydration and heart or kidney failure.

Treatment

There is no specific treatment for MDMA abuse. The best available treatment is cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) to help the user learn coping skills to help break the cycle.

CBT teaches the user to recognize the situations when he or she is most likely to use MDMA, how to avoid those situations and how to cope with the problems related to drug abuse. Drug abuse recovery support groups may also be helpful.

Information adapted from the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy and the National Institute on Drug Abuse.