



Ecstasy or methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA)

Ecstasy facts at a glance

The signs and symptoms of using ecstasy can include:

- Increased blood pressure and pulse rate
- Dilated pupils
- Raised body temperature
- Sweating
- Loss of appetite
- Jaw clenching
- Nausea
- Nervousness
- Confusion
- Teeth grinding
- Vomiting
- Hallucinations
- Tremors
- Insomnia
- Panic
- Visual distortions

The consequences of using ecstasy may include:

- Chronic sleep problems
- Cracked teeth through grinding
- High blood pressure
- Dehydration
- Anxiety
- Decreased emotional control
- Lethargy
- Severe depression
- Memory impairment
- Nerve cell damage
- Serotonin syndrome
- Death from heart failure
- Rhabdomyolysis – overheating to the point of organs liquefying

What is ecstasy?

Ecstasy tablets are supposedly made up of the primary ingredient methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA), but as the ingredients required to make synthetic drugs are becoming more difficult to obtain, the formulation of pills marketed as ecstasy can vary greatly. They are more likely to contain methamphetamine (speed) combined with a synthetic hallucinogen or para-methoxyamphetamine (PMA).

Ecstasy is known by a variety of other names, including: E, pills, Ex, pingers, E n C, eccy, MDMA, XTC, ecstasy and disco biscuits.

Physical effects

Ecstasy usually produces a euphoric rush, usually within 20 minutes of swallowing it, which can last up to eight hours. There have been reported cases of symptoms lasting for as long as 32 hours after using ecstasy. Users may feel more alert, energetic and affectionate. Ecstasy also suppresses appetite.

The stimulants in ecstasy actually speed up the activity in the central nervous system. At the same time the hallucinogens in the drug can affect perception, causing things to appear distorted, or things that don't exist to be seen or heard.

There are usually three phases experienced when taking ecstasy:

Coming up: the user may experience tightening of muscles, especially jaw, dilated pupils, visual distortions, nausea or vomiting, strong pulse, increased temperature, confusion and panic.

Plateauing: the user may experience feeling happy, more awake, relaxed, open, confident, talkative and have decreased urine output and increased thirst.

Coming down: the user can feel physically exhausted, depressed, anxious, paranoid, irritable, unable to sleep and the comedown will be more intense if they have taken other drugs, including alcohol.

Problems

Short term:	Long term:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increased heart rate• Increased blood pressure• Overheating• Jaw clenching• Teeth grinding• Tremors• Nausea• Enlarged pupils• Anxiety	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cracked teeth through clenching and grinding• High blood pressure• Possible memory and attention impairment• Lethargy• Decreased emotional control• Severe depression• Possible nerve cell damage

Taking ecstasy in a hot or humid environment, like a dance party or nightclub, can cause dehydration and raise the body's temperature to dangerous levels. This increases the risk of the body heating up to levels that cause organs to fail, breakdown and eventually cause the heart to stop.

There is also a risk of serotonin syndrome or toxicity, which is an excess of the neurotransmitter serotonin (brain chemical) typically caused from mixing ecstasy with various, but not all, antidepressants or simply taking an overdose. The symptoms include:

- agitation
- confusion
- headache
- tachycardia – a rapid heart beat that greater than 100 beats per minute
- hypertension (high blood pressure)
- hyperpyrexia – an abnormally high fever
- muscle twitches
- coma
- death.

There are a number of psychological problems associated with ecstasy including the 'hangover effect', depression that can last for days after using ecstasy. This is because serotonin in the brain is reduced by ecstasy use. Research in animals shows that this serotonin loss is long lasting (up to three years) and may even be permanent.

There is a greater risk of physical and psychological harm as a result of taking ecstasy for those with the following conditions: heart disease, diabetes, epilepsy, liver problems, hypertension, panic attacks or a history of mental illness.