

Ecstasy (MDMA)

Ecstasy is a hallucinogen related to amphetamine. It also has stimulant properties. It is a chemical (methylenedioxy-methamphetamine or MDMA) made in drug labs. Ecstasy is also called E, XTC, Adam, Euphoria, X, MDM, and Love Doves.

Ecstasy usually comes in small gelatin capsules or tablets. They can be any colour, and may have a design on one side such as a dove or diamond. It can also come as a powder, which is snorted or, less commonly, dissolved and injected.

As with other illegal drugs, it is impossible to know exactly what chemicals were used to make ecstasy, or what effects you might experience. Although users may think ecstasy is harmless, little is known about the long-term effects of regular use.

Possessing, producing, and trafficking in ecstasy can result in fines, prison sentences, and criminal records.

“Herbal ecstasy” (misspelled on purpose to set it apart from MDMA) is supposed to be a natural and legal alternative. It is a blend of herbs that usually includes ephedra (a basis for some asthma medications) and caffeine. Users often think that because it is “natural,” it is safe. At high doses, however, ephedra can cause heart problems. It is also dangerous to take ephedra if you are on certain antidepressant drugs.

Effects of short-term use

- The effects of ecstasy can be felt about 20 to 40 minutes after taking it. The high usually lasts between four to six hours.
- Ecstasy can make you feel mildly intoxicated, relaxed, and energetic.
- Users report feeling trusting, loving, and warm toward others. Some say they experience spiritual insights.
- Ecstasy makes sensations stronger (especially touch).
- Ecstasy can also cause jaw clenching, teeth grinding, anxiety or panic attacks, blurred vision, vomiting, and increased sweating, blood pressure, and heart rate.
- It may cause depression, irritability, poor concentration, forgetfulness, exhaustion and paranoia. These effects can last for several days.
- Ecstasy has been involved in deaths due to severe dehydration and heat exhaustion,

abnormal heart rhythms, and liver failure. Drinking plenty of non-alcoholic beverages may reduce these risks.

- There is evidence that high doses of ecstasy can damage brain cells.
- As is the case with other drugs, the effects may have a lot to do with the state of mind and health of the user.
- In general terms, higher doses do not enhance the desirable effects.

Effects of long-term use

- Using ecstasy for a long time may cause permanent chemical changes in the brain. This can result in mood changes and disrupted sleep patterns long after use has stopped.
- Some regular users become irritable, paranoid, or depressed. They may experience flashbacks or psychosis.
- Repeated use can cause liver damage.
- People who use drugs often can develop serious personal problems. Using drugs can become more important than family and friends. They may continue using even when their job or schoolwork is suffering, or when they run into financial, spiritual, or legal problems.
- Young people who use drugs heavily may not learn how to solve problems, handle their emotions, and become mature, responsible adults.

Ecstasy and addiction

People who use ecstasy regularly for several weeks or months need larger amounts to feel the same effects. There is little information on whether ecstasy produces dependence or withdrawal symptoms if regular use stops.

For more information and to find an addiction services office near you, please call the 24-hour Helpline at 1-866-332-2322.