

Ecstasy

Patient Education Module

What is ecstasy?

Ecstasy (MDMA) is both a stimulant (amphetamine-like) and mild calming (tranquilizing) substance. Ecstasy is also called Adam, XTC, X, hug, beans, and the love drug. Ecstasy pills often have a logo, such as cartoon characters, stamped on them. This drug is most often taken as a pill, but the powder form is sometimes snorted or, rarely, injected into a vein.

This stimulant's effects help a person dance for long periods of time without getting tired. Ecstasy is said to enhance the sense of pleasure and boost self-confidence. Its hallucinogenic effects include feelings of peacefulness, acceptance, and empathy. People who use the drug claim they experience feelings of closeness with other people and want to touch or hug others.

Ecstasy causes muscle tension and jaw-clenching, which has led to the use of baby pacifiers to reduce this discomfort. It also causes nausea, blurred vision, rapid eye movement, faintness, and chills or sweating. In high doses ecstasy can cause a sharp increase in body temperature, leading to dehydration, muscle breakdown, kidney failure, or heart failure and *death*. A person who does not drink extra water can become severely dehydrated. When ecstasy is used with alcohol, the effects can be more harmful.

Ecstasy can cause confusion, depression, sleep problems, and severe anxiety that may last weeks after taking the drug. Over time, use of ecstasy can lead to thought and memory problems. If a rash that looks like acne develops after using ecstasy, the person may be at risk for liver damage by continuing use of the drug.

Please note that drugs sold as ecstasy may not contain any methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA); they can be a mix of amphetamine, paramethoxyamphetamine (PMA), ketamine, NBOMe, methylone or other substances. Ecstasy is a stimulant drug, which means it speeds up the messages travelling between the brain and body. Ecstasy contains the drug MDMA. However, many pills sold as ecstasy only have a small amount of MDMA or none at all. Other drugs and "fillers" like household cleaning products are often used instead. This makes it hard to know what reactions to expect after taking ecstasy or how bad the side effects will be.

Other names

Eckies, E, XTC, pills, pingers, bikkies, flippers, and molly.

How is ecstasy used?

Ecstasy comes in a tablet form and is usually swallowed. The pills come in different colors and sizes and are often imprinted with a picture or symbol.

Effects of ecstasy

There is no safe level of drug use. Use of any drug always carries some risk. The effects of ecstasy are usually felt about 20 minutes to an hour after it's taken and last for around 6 hours. The following effects may be experienced:

Jaw clenching and teeth grinding	Feeling happy, energetic and confident
Fast heart beat	Large pupils
Excessive sweating and skin tingles	Heightened senses (sight, hearing and touch)
Dehydration	Muscle aches and pains
Heat stroke	Nausea and reduced appetite
Anxiety	Hallucinations
Death caused by drinking extreme amounts of water	Irritability, paranoia and violence

Coming down

In the days after ecstasy use, the following may be experienced:

Restless sleep and exhaustion
Anxiety, irritability and depression
Difficulty concentrating.

Mixing ecstasy with other drugs

The effects of taking ecstasy with other drugs, including prescribed medications, can be unpredictable and dangerous, and could cause:

Ecstasy + alcohol = increased risk of dehydration and consequently drinking too much water which can lead to death.

Ecstasy + ice or speed = increased risk of anxiety and reduced brain functioning due to dopamine depletion.

Ecstasy + ice or speed = enormous strain on the heart and other parts of the body, which can lead to stroke.

Ecstasy + antidepressants = Drowsiness, clumsiness, restlessness, feeling drunk and dizzy.

Withdrawal

Giving up ecstasy after using it for a long time is challenging because the body has to get used to functioning without it. Withdrawal symptoms should settle down after a week and will mostly disappear after a month. Symptoms include:

Cravings for ecstasy	Exhaustion
Aches and pains	Anxiety and depression
Agitation	Trouble concentrating
Restless sleep	