

ECSTASY

What is ecstasy?

Ecstasy is the street term for a number of substances that are similar to methylenedioxyamphetamine (MDMA). It is classified as a stimulant with hallucinogenic properties.

Although ecstasy users are seeking the MDMA effects of the drug, like any illegal drug, there is no 'quality control' during the manufacturing process and therefore a user can never be sure what he or she is actually taking. Some of the tablets sold as ecstasy in Australia today do not contain MDMA at all, and are more likely to contain methamphetamine, perhaps in combination with an hallucinogenic such as ketamine, an anaesthetic used primarily in veterinary surgery. They might also contain illegal chemicals like MDA, PMA or MDEA, or substances like caffeine or paracetamol. Some of the ecstasy tested has contained no active stimulant at all.

Ecstasy is usually sold as a tablet or pill, but can also be found in capsule or powder form. The tablets come in a variety of colours and sizes and may carry a branded design such as a lightning bolt or crown. In recent times well-known brands such as Calvin Klein and Rolls Royce have been found stamped on ecstasy tablets. Despite this identification, there is no reliable method of determining the quality of the drug, since pills with the same stamp can vary widely in the content of MDMA and other substances.

How many people use ecstasy?

According to the 2001 National Drug Household Survey, 6% of the Australian population reported using ecstasy at some time, and 3% had used it in the last 12 months.

The average age at first use was 22 years.

The 1999 Secondary School Survey also indicated that some young people attending high school across Australia had experimented with ecstasy, with 5% of 12-17 year old males and 3% of females ever reporting use.

- 7% of 17 year old males reported ever using ecstasy
- 5% of 17 year old females reported ever using ecstasy
- 4% of 12 year old males reported ever using ecstasy
- 1% of 12 year old females reported ever using ecstasy

Other names for ecstasy

Ecstasy is also known as E, eccy, XTC, pills, eggs, doves and MDMA.



What are the short-term effects of ecstasy?

The short-term effects of using ecstasy may include:

- euphoria and a feeling of well-being
- feelings of increased closeness with others
- increased self-confidence
- lack of inhibitions
- tongue and cheek chewing
- teeth grinding
- dry mouth
- increased body temperature
- nausea and anxiety
- sweating
- inability to sleep

What are the long-term effects of ecstasy?

Little is known about the long-term effects of ecstasy because of the paucity of research. Many of the early results are highly controversial but it is generally accepted that, particularly at high doses, some health problems will result from long-term use. Some of these may include:

- neurotoxicity
- memory and cognition problems
- depression

Severe reactions when taking the drug have occurred and there have been a number of ecstasy-related deaths in Australia and overseas.

Results of Party Drug Trends 2001

The study found that ecstasy users:

- although both males and females of all ages use ecstasy, as with all illicit drugs, ecstasy use is most common among young males
- ecstasy users tend to be young, most being aged in their late teens or early 20s
- ecstasy users are relatively well-educated, with most having completed high school and a substantial proportion with tertiary qualifications
- a high proportion of ecstasy users are either employed or engaged in studies
- ecstasy users have little contact with the criminal justice system or with drug treatment agencies
- demographic characteristics of ecstasy users in Sydney appear to have changed little since 1997. However, NDS surveys indicate that prevalence of use has increased, such that now there is a larger group of people who have ever used ecstasy, as well as a larger group of people who have used it recently
- on average, ecstasy users start using the drug in their late teens, although there are consistent reports from both users and KIS that the age of initiation is decreasing
- the great majority of ecstasy users consume the drug orally
- there are a wide range of patterns of ecstasy use, but, on average, regular users use the drug between weekly and fortnightly
- the majority of regular ecstasy users use, on average, more than one tablet per use episode
- a substantial proportion of regular ecstasy users have recently used four or more tablets in a single use episode