



Ecstasy (e, eccy, pills, pingers, eggs)

Ecstasy is the street name for a range of drugs that are similar in structure to methylenedioxyamphetamine (MDMA) for example, methylenedioxyamphetamine (MDA) or methylenedioxy-N-ethylamphetamine (MDEA). These drugs are classified as being stimulant drugs with hallucinogenic properties.

When ecstasy was first used as a recreational drug in Australia in the late 1980's people were mostly taking imported pills that more or less had the effects associated with the 'love drug' MDMA. As the drug became more popular in the 1990's, it was increasingly being manufactured in Australia and the purity of the drug decreased as the ingredients were hard to obtain. As a result, ecstasy contents were more likely to be methamphetamine and/or ketamine, MDA, MDEA, caffeine, glucose, bicarb soda or other household substances or chemicals. A current report¹ from Victoria regarding the contents of pills shows there are increased levels of MDMA and also of no active ingredient at all, and decreased levels of methamphetamine and ketamine. The contents of pills are always changing.

How is it used?

Ecstasy is usually swallowed in pills that often have logos printed on them defining different batches. The pills can also be crushed and snorted or 'shafted' which means inserted into the anus. Some people have been known to inject crushed pills but this is highly dangerous due to the impurities. MDMA powder has also been available but, like all street drugs, there is no quality control and you never really know what you are taking.

Immediate effects:

- Euphoria and feelings of wellbeing
- Closeness with others
- Increased confidence and energy
- Jaw clenching, teeth grinding
- Increased heart rate and blood pressure
- Dilated pupils, heightened awareness
- Nausea, loss of appetite
- Increased temperature, sweating

Long term effects

The long term effects of ecstasy use are inconclusive. Research shows that few people tend to use ecstasy for long periods of time, perhaps because the negative effects of use like 'the come down' start outweighing the positive ones². There is currently a lot of research being done on the effects ecstasy that use may have on the brain. There is limited evidence to suggest that ecstasy use may contribute to:

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- Depression and/or anxiety
- Sleep disturbances, insomnia
- Memory and cognitive impairment

Deaths from ecstasy

The toxic effects of ecstasy have been associated with heart attack, brain hemorrhage, blood clotting, kidney failure and overheating. Several deaths have occurred from dilutional hyponatremia which means that the person's brain has swelled from excessive fluid intake.

Overheating and dehydration

This is by far the most common adverse effect of ecstasy use. Ecstasy affects the body's temperature, if you use it in a hot environment, dancing and not drinking enough water or juice, you may experience seizures, kidney and liver impairment and sometimes death.

Signs of overheating and dehydration include:

- Feeling very hot, confused and not well
- Developing a headache or throwing up
- Not being able to pee and/or your pee is dark in colour
- Being unable to slow the heart rate down while chilling out

Tips to avoid overheating and dehydration:

- Chill out and take regular breaks from dancing to keep cool
- Sip 500mls of water every hour when active, 250mls if inactive
- Keep hydrated the day before and after if you choose to use ecstasy
- Avoid drinking alcohol if on ecstasy - it will further dehydrate you
- If you are dancing a lot and not sweating, not peeing and you're feeling wrong..... Seek Help Immediately!

Para-methoxyamphetamine (PMA)

It is sold as a pill, with a logo and belongs to the same 'amphetamine family' as ecstasy but is much more potent and far more toxic. **Remember - you can never be sure of what you are taking.** The toxicity is related to excessive central nervous system stimulation and users may experience hallucinations, delirium, agitation, muscle rigidity, sweating, high fever, seizures, coma and death.

Social dealing

Many ecstasy users do not realise the great legal risk they take when they purchase the drug in bulk for themselves and their friends. Most people are well

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aware that ecstasy is an illegal drug, however many are completely ignorant to the fact that if you get caught it does not take much to have your charge lifted from possession to supply.

If you are buying illegal drugs for your friends and you get caught, you could be prosecuted for 'supply'³ even if you are not making any money out of the transaction. Similarly, if you get searched going into an event and you are found to have more than a "personal use" amount of drugs on you, it is possible that you could be charged with a serious criminal offense which could impact on your life and affect relationships, work and travel options.

It is important to remember that the best way to avoid harm from drugs is not to use at all.

Useful links

National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre www.ndarc.med.unsw.edu.au

Australian Drug Foundation www.adf.org.au

Keep It Simple www.kis.org.au

1 Quinn, C., Dunn, M. & Degenhardt, L. (2007). The illicit tablet marketing Victoria, 2004-2007. EDRS Drug Trends Bulletin, December 2007. Sydney: National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, University of NSW

2 ADF Ecstasy How Drugs Affect You NDARC Ecstasy Factsheet

3 http://www.theshopfront.org/documents/Drug_Offences_004524203v18.pdf

NCETA (2004) Alcohol and Other Drugs: A Handbook for Health Professionals.