

ECSTASY

THE FACTS



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THE LAW

It is illegal to possess, manufacture, supply or use ecstasy in Australia. Penalties range from a \$2,000 fine and/or a two-year prison term, to a \$100,000 fine and/or imprisonment for 25 years. In addition, the person convicted of a drug offence will receive a criminal record and this can lead to difficulties in getting a job, credit or visas for overseas travel.

WHAT IS ECSTASY?

Ecstasy is the name given to methylenedioxyamphetamine (MDMA). Ecstasy is a derivative of the amphetamine group and has both stimulant and hallucinogenic properties. It is sometimes referred to as a psychedelic amphetamine.

Ecstasy does not always contain just MDMA. Ecstasy pills are often mixed with a variety of other substances including aspirin, caffeine and ketamine (a veterinary anaesthetic agent). Sometimes drugs containing no MDMA are sold as ecstasy. This makes it difficult for people to know what they are taking.

WHERE DOES ECSTASY COME FROM?

Methylenedioxyamphetamine was first synthesised by Merck Pharmaceuticals in 1912. It was originally developed as an appetite suppressant, although it was never actually used for this purpose. In the 1970s, MDMA was used in American therapy classes to enhance communication. Ecstasy became available in Australia in the mid-1980s, and became an illegal drug in 1987.

HOW IS ECSTASY USED?

Ecstasy tablets or capsules are usually swallowed. When swallowed, the effects become apparent within 30 minutes and last for up to six hours. The hangover effects may last for up to 24 hours.

Ecstasy may also be taken by suppository, snorting, smoking or injecting crushed tablets. As ecstasy usually comes in tablet form, it is not designed to be injected. The tablets are bound by a chalky substance, which if injected, can cause blocked veins or other unpleasant effects such as abscesses, blood poisoning (septicaemia) and gangrene.

HOW MANY PEOPLE USE ECSTASY?

The 2004 National Drug Strategy Household Survey reported that 10% of Western Australians aged 14 years and over had ever used ecstasy, 4% had used ecstasy in the last 12 months and 2% had used ecstasy in the last four weeks. Males were more likely to have used ecstasy than females.

Reported use of ecstasy is greatest among 20- to 29-year-olds. In total, 30% of 20- to 29-year-olds had used ecstasy in their lifetime, 14% in the last 12 months and 7% in the last four weeks.

HEALTH EFFECTS OF USING ECSTASY

The effects of ecstasy will vary from person to person depending on characteristics of the:

- **Individual (user)** – Mood, physical size, health, gender, previous experience with ecstasy, expectations of the drug, personality, whether the person has had food and whether other drugs have been taken.

- **Drug** – The amount used, its purity, and whether it is taken as a suppository, by snorting, smoking or injecting.
- **Setting (environment)** – Whether the person is using with friends, on his/her own, in a social setting or at home, at work or before driving.

SHORT-TERM EFFECTS	SHORT-TERM EFFECTS OF HIGHER DOSES	LONG-TERM EFFECTS
• nausea	• irrational behaviour	• depression
• sweating	• agitation	• drowsiness
• hot and cold flushes	• convulsions	• muscle aches
• jaw clenching	• dehydration	• loss of appetite
• teeth grinding	• urinary retention (hypernatraemia)	• insomnia
• feeling of wellbeing	• vomiting	• loss of concentration
• anxiety	• hallucinations	• irritability
• increased pulse rate	• excessive thirst	
• increased blood pressure	• rhabdomyolysis (muscle meltdown)	
• high body temperature		
• exaggerated confidence		
• dry mouth		
• insomnia		
• poor concentration		

Research suggests that weekend use of ecstasy may lead to a depressed mood mid-week.

There are also dangerous effects associated with the method of use. Snorting can damage the fragile mucous membrane in the nasal passages. It produces burns and sores on the membranes that line the interior of the nose. Injecting ecstasy can result in blocked blood vessels that can cause major damage to the body's organs, such as inflamed blood vessels and abscesses, blood poisoning, bacterial infections which may damage the heart valves, vein collapse, infection at injection site, bruising or more serious injuries if users inject into an artery or tissue.

ECSTASY AND OTHER DRUGS

Ecstasy users sometimes take other drugs such as minor tranquillisers and alcohol to cope with some of the undesirable effects experienced after using ecstasy. They may also use ecstasy in conjunction with other drugs such as cannabis, amphetamines, LSD or alcohol. Using more than one drug (poly-drug use) increases the risk of complications and serious side-effects, and can lead to a variety of serious physical and psychological problems. For example, using ecstasy with other drugs that dehydrate the body, such as speed and alcohol, can increase the problems associated with dehydration.

ECSTASY AND MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

Ecstasy use can cause anxiety, depression, paranoia and psychosis in those people who have a vulnerability to mental health problems.

RELATIONSHIPS

Drug use can lead to social and emotional problems and affect relationships with family and friends. When people are under the influence of a drug, changes can occur in their behaviour depending on how they feel (e.g. euphoric, sick or energetic) which can lead to problems with friends or family members.

TOLERANCE, DEPENDENCE AND THE AFTER EFFECTS OF ECSTASY USE

Regular, heavy ecstasy use can lead to tolerance and dependence.

- **Tolerance** – Users can develop tolerance to ecstasy. Tolerance means that a person needs more of the drug to achieve the same effects they felt previously with smaller amounts. When this happens, users often take greater amounts of ecstasy and may begin to use other illegal drugs.
- **Dependence** – This means that the drug becomes central to a person's life and they feel they cannot function properly without it.
- **The after effects of ecstasy use** – As ecstasy starts to wear off users are likely to experience a number of negative effects such as feeling physically exhausted and anxious, paranoid, irritable and depressed, and a general feeling of being flat. These after effects may be heightened for users who have injected ecstasy or who have combined ecstasy with other drugs.

OVERDOSE

Overdose occurs when the level of intoxication from the drug reaches a point where it begins to produce physical and/or psychological harm. Overdose from ecstasy usually results from the body overheating and becoming dehydrated, which can cause muscle meltdown (rhabdomyolysis) and possible death from the failure of major organs such as the kidneys or liver. Overdose may also result from excessive water consumption and retention (hypernatraemia). This may cause cells in the body to swell, which can result in brain damage and death.

The risk of overdose generally increases with a larger dose. As the strength and content of street ecstasy is unknown it can be difficult to judge the dose, increasing the risk of overdose.

ECSTASY AND PREGNANCY

Most drugs cross the placenta, and therefore have some effect on the unborn child. There is only limited research on the specific effects of using ecstasy during pregnancy. However, there is potential to harm the child, especially if ecstasy is combined with other drugs. It is possible that miscarriage can result from using ecstasy.

Injecting ecstasy also increases the risk of HIV infection and other disease for both the mother and the baby.

It is recommended that women check with their doctor (or other health professional) if they are using or planning to use drugs while pregnant or breastfeeding, including prescribed and over-the-counter medicines.

COST

The street price of ecstasy changes depending on availability and market trends. The cost of purchasing ecstasy can lead to financial problems for both occasional and regular users.

ECSTASY AND DRIVING

It is dangerous to drive under the influence of ecstasy, as coordination and the ability to judge speed and distance can be impaired. It is also dangerous to drive before or after the ecstasy has taken effect. The user cannot predict when the ecstasy will take effect or if residual effects will impact on driving ability.

In Western Australia, it is against the law for anyone to drive under the influence of drugs, including ecstasy. The Road Traffic Act 1974 Section 63 states that ‘a person who drives or attempts to drive a motor vehicle while under the influence of alcohol, drugs, or alcohol and drugs to such an extent as to be incapable of having proper control of the vehicle commits an offence, and the offender may be arrested without warrant’. Breaking this law carries penalties including disqualification from driving, fines and/or imprisonment.

A person convicted of an offence under the Road Traffic Act 1974 is liable for the following:

First Offence:

- a fine ranging from \$400 to \$2,500
- disqualification from holding or obtaining a driver's licence for up to six months.

Second Offence:

- a fine ranging from \$800 to \$3,500 or imprisonment for six months
- disqualification from holding or obtaining a driver's licence for up to two years.

Third or Subsequent Offence:

- a fine ranging from \$800 to \$5,000 or imprisonment for 18 months
- permanent disqualification from holding or obtaining a driver's licence.

TAKING CARE

It is safer not to use ecstasy. However, if you use the drug or know someone who does, remember the following:

- Because using ecstasy can have harmful effects, users can find themselves in dangerous situations. Therefore, they should not be left alone. If the situation becomes unsafe call for help immediately.
- Keep cool when dancing or doing other physical activities. Watch your body temperature by taking regular breaks and keep cool by wearing light, absorbent clothing. Beware of hats, as they trap body heat. Your body should not get hotter than 38.5 C. Drink water, but regulate intake so that you do not drink too much because it's important to maintain a balance between your water intake and the

amount you are getting rid of either by sweating or urination. It is recommended that people using ecstasy sip up to 500mls of water per hour if they are active e.g. dancing, or sip up to 250ml if they are inactive.

- Watch for other signs that may show something is wrong, such as confusion, a resting pulse greater than 120 beats per minute, nausea, excessive fluid consumption, inability to urinate, severe headache or convulsions.
- If someone does react badly, call an ambulance immediately. Don't delay, you could save a life. The ambulance officers are there to help you. Be sure to describe what drug the person has taken. If the person is unconscious and you know first aid, place them in the recovery position and ensure the airway is clear. If they have stopped breathing, perform Expired Air Resuscitation (EAR). The police are not required to attend unless a death has occurred or the ambulance officers are threatened.
- Rest the next day, eat a substantial meal and drink plenty of water or juice.
- It is extremely dangerous to inject ecstasy. However, if you or someone you know does inject, always use clean equipment (needle, syringe, swab, tourniquet, spoon, glass, filter and sterile water) and do not share gear. Fitpacks® which contain clean syringes are available from:
 - most pharmacies
 - needle and syringe exchange programs (For information on opening times and locations of these programs phone the Alcohol and Drug Information Service, contact details are outlined at the back of this booklet)
 - some regional hospitals, health centres and nursing posts.

TREATMENT PATHWAYS

There are a variety of treatment pathways available for people with ecstasy-related problems. The drug(s) used and the availability of services as well as the user's health, desired outcome, support network and unique circumstances need to be taken into consideration. Deciding on the best treatment pathway or combination of pathways is best done in consultation with a drug and alcohol counsellor.

MORE INFORMATION

For up-to-date information about ecstasy or other drugs call the Alcohol and Drug Information Service or Parent Drug Information Service, or visit www.drugaware.com.au

Alcohol and Drug Information Service

- Access information about drugs confidentially and quickly.
- Talk to a professionally trained counsellor about alcohol or other drugs.
- Find out about other services.

(08) 9442 5000

1800 198 024 toll free country callers

Parent Drug Information Service

- Drug information and support for parents and family members.
- Talk to a professionally trained counsellor about alcohol and other drugs.
- Talk confidentially to another parent for strategies and support.

- Find out where to go for further help.

(08) 9442 5050

1800 653 203 toll free country callers

www.drugaware.com.au

- Access detailed information about drugs.
- Find out about the latest issues.
- Post questions and have them answered anonymously by health professionals.
- Find links to other useful sites.

For further information about the Drug and Alcohol Office's Prevention Directorate programs, publications or resources call (08) 9370 0358 or visit www.dao.health.wa.gov.au

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Changes in circumstances after the date of publication of this brochure inevitably will result in this brochure becoming outdated in some respects. It is the responsibility of readers of this brochure to keep themselves updated with any changes or developments.



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**For information on ecstasy, visit www.drugaware.com.au
or for confidential advice and counselling call the Alcohol and
Drug Information Service 24 hour helpline
on 9442 5000 or 1800 198 024 (country callers).**