



Ecstasy and depression

What is ecstasy?

Ecstasy is the common name for drugs that are similar in structure to MethyleneDioxyMethAmphetamine, or MDMA. It is a synthetic drug usually sold as small tablets, which come in a variety of colours and sizes. It is also available as powder and can be inhaled through the nose (snorted) or injected.

What are the effects?

Ecstasy is similar in structure and effect to stimulants (eg amphetamines) and hallucinogens (eg LSD).

The effects of ecstasy depend on:

- the amount taken
- the person's experience with the drug
- the person's expectations and the mood they are in
- the way in which the drug is taken
- the quality and purity of the drug.

The effects can start after about an hour and can last up to six hours, but may last as long as 32 hours.

Immediate effects of ecstasy can include increased feelings of self-confidence, wellbeing and feeling close to others; a rise in blood pressure, body temperature and pulse rate; jaw clenching and teeth grinding; sweating; dehydration; nausea and anxiety.

Ecstasy may also produce a 'hangover' effect. Symptoms can include loss of appetite, insomnia, depression and muscle aches. It can also make concentration difficult – particularly on the day after ecstasy is taken.

Higher doses of ecstasy can produce hallucinations, irrational behaviour, vomiting and convulsions. There is some evidence to suggest that long-term use of ecstasy may cause damage to the brain, heart and liver.

Can you overdose with ecstasy?

Overdose of ecstasy can occur and is characterised by increased heart rate and blood pressure, elevated body temperature and hallucinations. Some deaths have also occurred, usually as a result of heart attack, overheating and drinking too much water.

People can develop tolerance to the pleasurable effects of ecstasy. This means that more ecstasy is needed to get the same effects as before.

Will drinking water help?

As ecstasy may cause body temperature to increase, it is important to keep sipping water to prevent dehydration. Drinking water does not reduce the effects of ecstasy; it only prevents dehydration. Drinking too much water, however, may lead to serious health complications in some people.

What about other drugs with ecstasy?

Other drugs are often used with ecstasy, often as a way of coping with some of its undesirable effects. Little is known about the effects of these combinations. In general, health risks tend to increase when two or more drugs are used together, particularly if the doses are large.

Many people report feeling depressed after taking ecstasy. Most often this depression is mild and lasts only a day or two. However, some people report feeling depressed for much longer periods of time after taking ecstasy, particularly if they use it frequently or take large doses.

What is depression?

Depression is something all of us feel at times. For some people, though, depression is not just a low mood but a serious illness causing physical and psychological symptoms. It is often not recognised and as a consequence left untreated. Depression is often associated with anxiety.

The expression 'clinical depression' describes a group of illnesses that are characterised by an excessive and/or long term depressed mood affecting most aspects of a person's life.

What causes some people to feel depressed after taking ecstasy?

It is believed that ecstasy can lead to depression in some people. However, the precise relation between ecstasy and depression remains unclear.

Ecstasy results in the release of large amounts of serotonin, a chemical in the brain responsible for mood, which causes the euphoria that is characteristic of ecstasy use. One theory addressing the relationship between ecstasy and depression proposes that this artificial release of serotonin reduces or depletes the brain's normal supply of serotonin and that it can take some time for this supply to be replenished. The depression that some people feel after taking ecstasy is

Ecstasy and depression continued...

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thought to be a result of these reduced or depleted serotonin levels. The length of time that it takes for the serotonin levels to be fully restored in the brain after ecstasy use depends on a number of factors including an individual's diet, general health, genetic make-up and how much ecstasy the person took. There's no way to tell for sure, but based on animal studies, scientists say that it can take anywhere from 48 hours to an entire week. The length of time for the serotonin to be replenished is thought to reflect the 'post-ecstasy' depression that many people experience.

Can ecstasy help with depression?

Some ecstasy users who experience depression might have been depressed before they started using ecstasy. It is possible that some ecstasy users are unconsciously trying to feel good in the light of their depression. Of course, ecstasy is not an effective daily antidepressant and may actually exacerbate symptoms of depression.

Reducing the risk of depression if using ecstasy

- **Use in moderation**

There are biochemical reasons (explained above) why frequent MDMA use increases the likelihood of depression.

**Remember, with ecstasy,
LESS IS MORE.**

- **Eat well**

Your body produces serotonin by combining together various amino acids found in proteins. Maintaining a well balanced diet that includes enough complete proteins and the proper vitamins and minerals will help you stay healthy and rebound more easily from serotonin depletion.

- **Sleep**

Many of your brain's restorative processes take place while you sleep. Not getting enough sleep may significantly lengthen the time it takes for your brain to replenish its serotonin.

- **Use lower doses**

And avoid 'booster' doses, or taking more when you come down. Remember, when you come down from MDMA you have already depleted much of your serotonin. Depleting it even more will lengthen the time it takes to be replenished. **LESS IS MORE**, with ecstasy.

Should I seek medical treatment if i feel depressed after taking ecstasy?

It is always a good idea to see a psychiatrist or psychologist if you are experiencing prolonged depression, regardless of its cause. Keep in mind that if you begin treatment with an anti-depressant medication, MDMA will interfere with its effectiveness.

Useful references

Australian Drug Foundation
www.adf.org.au

National Alliance of the Mentally Ill (USA)
www.nami.org

ARAFEMI
www.vicnet.net.au/~arafemi

Carers Victoria
www.carersvic.org.au

Mental Illness Fellowship Victoria
www.mifellowship.org

Mental Illness Fellowship Victoria fact sheet

Understanding depression

Understanding dual diagnosis

What can friends and family do to help a person experiencing mental illness?

Family and carer supports and services

Substance use: stages of change model



mental illness
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for people with mental illness,
their families and friends

For information and support

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