



Hallucinogens/ Psychedelics

'Hallucinogens' is a catch-all term for a wide variety of psychoactive substances which occur naturally in plants or are manufactured in laboratories. Hallucinogens alter the way you perceive the world. They have been used for thousands of years and by many societies for their mystical and spiritual associations and became fashionable in America and Europe in the 1960s.

In New Zealand the use, possession or supply of any hallucinogenic drug is an offence and can carry fines and/or prison sentences.

What the drug does

Hallucinogens affect all the senses and cause hallucinations and produce feelings of unreality – you see or hear things that do not exist; your thinking and sense of time and emotions are distorted.

Hallucinogens affect people differently depending on their physical and emotional state, previous experience with the drug, the type and amount of drug taken, and the occasion on which the drug is taken (i.e. alone or with friends at a party etc). The effects can be unpredictable: users say one experience or 'trip' is pleasant, but the next intensely disturbing. Some people have experienced panic attacks and engaged in irrational behaviour.

Hallucinogens can be dangerous when combined with drugs like alcohol, cannabis, or amphetamines. This is because the effects of both drugs are increased in unpredictable ways.

Types of hallucinogens and their effects

LSD (lysergic acid diethylamide)

LSD is colourless, tasteless and odourless and comes in the form of liquid, tablets or capsules, squares of gelatine or blotting paper (tabs) and sugar cubes.

The effects begin within half an hour of taking the drug, peak at 3 - 5 hours, and can last for up to 12 hours (though the quality of LSD can vary hugely meaning the effects may last less nor more time). The most common effects of tripping on LSD are heightened sensory experiences: sound and colour is intensified and sometimes colours can be heard and sounds seen; a distorted sense of time (it can pass slowly or quickly) and of space; distorted awareness of ability and of your body (you might feel as if you are floating); unstable emotions; and more intense thinking.

A 'bad trip' is when the experience is not pleasant and is dominated by negative feelings and anxiety. Why some people have bad trips is not known but they are relatively common among first-time users.

Physically, LSD users may experience nausea, increased heart rate and blood pressure, variations in body temperature, and shakiness.

N-BOMe/N-bombs

Like LSD NBOMe comes in powder, capsules, sugar cubes, or tabs (squares of gelatine or blotting paper) sometimes decorated with pictures. It is increasingly common for NBOMe to be misrepresented as LSD and it's known as 'fake acid'.

The term N-bomb covers a range of NBOMe compounds and refers to any of several types of phenethylamine derivatives such as 25I-NBOMe. (NBOMe stands for N-Benzyl-Oxy-Methyl.) A few are amphetamine analogues.

N-Bombs (members of the NBOMe 'family' of drugs) are powerful hallucinogens with only a very small amount needed to have an effect. For example, the average dose of the N-Bomb 25I-NBOMe is between 0.000050 and 0.0001gm so it is really easy to overdose on the powder or liquid forms.

Users have reported the effects as including hallucinations, teeth grinding, rapid heartbeat, feeling extremely agitated and 'speedy'; according to local news reports it has taken 4 people to restrain violently agitated users. As the effects are similar to LSD some of the risks of LSD may apply to N-Bombs as well: psychosis, seizures, and kidney failure.

N-BOMe is relatively new to NZ; it is unapproved so cannot be sold or imported legally.

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Magic mushrooms (psilocybine)

Magic mushrooms are non-poisonous fungi which can be eaten or drunk in a tea.

The effects start within 15 - 45 minutes of taking them and last for 4 - 6 hours. Small amounts bring about a feeling of relaxation and mood change whereas larger amounts can cause a range of physical symptoms (e.g. muscle weakness and twitches, stomach pain, nausea and vomiting, and sweating, chills, shivering) as well as distorted or heightened sensations.

Datura (from the thorn apple and angel's trumpet plants)

Datura can cause serious medical conditions or death because of the plant's powerful alkaloid chemicals which can over-stimulate the heart and act as powerful muscle relaxant. People have reported losing their sight for a couple of days, an inability to concentrate, fear, paranoia and panic. Datura use has also been linked to kidney damage and/or kidney failure because of its strong diuretic effect. In New Zealand some people who have taken datura have required intensive care medical treatment.

The effects begin approximately 20 minutes after taking the drug and can last 6 - 10 hours but have been known to last several days. Physical effects include dilated pupils, chills, dry mouth, and nausea. People may become delirious, delusional, and have blackouts.

Mescaline (from the peyote cactus)

Mescaline is smoked or swallowed in capsule form or as tablets.

The effects begin within 1 - 2 hours of taking the drug, last between 10 - 12 hours and are somewhat different from those of LSD. Mescaline doesn't cause distortions or kaleidoscopic experiences; the hallucinations are consistent with actual experience, with heightened sensory experiences – for example, colours are more distinctive, brilliant and intense.

PCP/ 'angel dust' (phencyclidine)

PCP is a soluble crystalline powder that comes as pills, capsules, powder or liquid. Even in low doses PCP can produce harmful psychological effects. At high doses it can cause effects like seizures and long term use may lead to withdrawal symptoms and problems like memory loss and depression.

PCP is known as a dissociative drug in that it causes a lack of connection in a person's thoughts, memory and sense of identity. The effects can be very unpredictable and can include euphoria, loss of inhibitions, disorganised thoughts, and the feeling of being disassociated from the environment. Physical effects include excess saliva, sweating, staggering, slurred speech, fever, muscle rigidity and numbness.

Long term effects

There is some evidence that regular users of hallucinogens may be at greater risk of mental illnesses including psychosis and depression. Some studies suggest that heavy use can impair memory and concentration.

One of the long term effects of LSD use is the possibility of 'flashbacks': a spontaneous and unpredictable recurrence of the drug experience which may or may not be pleasant. Flashbacks can produce severe feelings of anxiety and can occur days, weeks and even years after the drug was last taken. They usually last for a minute or two and involve some kind of visual hallucination.

Tolerance and dependence

Tolerance to a drug means that increased amounts are necessary to achieve the expected effects. Tolerance develops to the hallucinatory effects of LSD and PCP. For LSD users it develops rapidly and goes away quickly once regular use is stopped.

Dependence on a drug means that it becomes central to a person's thoughts, activities and emotions. Some LSD users do become psychologically dependent on the drug, but there are no physical withdrawal symptoms when they stop taking the drug. PCP users have been found to have withdrawal symptoms on stopping.

Harm reduction

- No use is safest - especially around babies and children. If you are going to use make arrangements for children to be cared for by someone who is not using.

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- Although very little is known about the effects of hallucinogens on unborn babies, or how much of a hallucinogenic drug gets through to breast milk, it is not advisable to use these substances if you are pregnant or breastfeeding.
- Avoid driving or operating machinery. During hallucinations the user may be unable to tell what is real and what isn't and the distorted perception of time and space can result in injury to themselves or others.
- Use with someone you know and trust, preferably someone who knows how strong the effects of a hallucinogen can be.
- Make sure you are somewhere where you feel safe, secure and comfortable.
- Avoid taking LSD if you are upset, feeling low or insecure--this could lead to a bad trip.
- Avoid taking more. The effects come on stronger after a while, and you could end up having a much stronger trip than you can handle.
- If you're having a bad time, avoid flashing lights and visuals and get a friend to take you to a safe, calm space.

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