



# Ecstasy (MDMA)

## E, eckies, biscuits, pills

Ecstasy can make you feel great, increasing your energy and turning total strangers into your best friends. It can also cause depression long term. The greatest danger might even come from the amount of water you drink to keep cool.

Methylene-Dioxy-Meth-Amphetamine (MDMA) known as ecstasy was patented in the early 1900s as an appetite suppressant. It is a phenethylamine and has hallucinogenic (trippy) and stimulant (speedy) effects. E mostly comes as pills though can also be in capsules or powder.

'Ecstasy' has now become an umbrella term for mixtures of MDMA and other illegal drugs, as well as for a cocktail of other substances such as mephedrone, BZP, ketamine and DXM.

In NZ anything sold as E is more likely to contain caffeine, ketamine, or speed, or other newer synthetic stimulants such as MDA, MDEA, 2-CB etc and may contain no MDMA at all. The information here focuses on genuine E; for info about the newer synthetics and analogues see the *Hallucinogens/ psychedelics* information sheet.

## Loved up on E (what the drug does)

The effect of E depends on the individual person (size, mood, health, etc), their experience with E or similar drugs, the amount taken and the actual make-up of the drug. For example:

- MDA is much longer lasting, far more trippy and less speedy than MDMA. Users report stiff joints and limbs.
- MDEA is similar to MDMA in effect and duration, but more disorientating, speedier and not as blissful.
- MBDB usually gives a very relaxing milder buzz and is less speedy or visual than MDMA.
- Anal suppository (shelving) or crushed and then snorted or smoked E can result in an intense but short-lived experience. If injected, E is very full-on and dangerous, especially if you don't know exactly what's in it! Women generally need less E to feel the effects due to their smaller body weight and different water: fat ratios.
- The effects of orally taking a good quality E usually come on within 20 to 60 minutes. Initially you may be a bit sick, uneasy or spaced out but this passes. The buzz then shifts to feelings of euphoria and being connected with others (loved up) with energy to party. The effects peak after about 2 hours and body rushes are often experienced. Feelings of lesser intensity usually last 4 to 6 hours. Some residual effects may last longer.
- Because E is manufactured illegally it's likely to be mixed with other substances or may have toxic by-products from the manufacturing process. This can cause a range of unpleasant or harmful effects.

### Common effects of E (MDMA) include:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feelings of euphoria</li> <li>• Heightened sense of touch</li> <li>• Increased sense of empathy or connection with others</li> <li>• Decreased awareness of fatigue, hunger and thirst</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General stimulation of brain and nervous system (e.g. widened pupils, increased body temperature, increased blood pressure and heart rate, increased sweating, and initial anxiety)</li> <li>• Jaw clenching and/or teeth gritting and grinding</li> <li>• Dehydration or water retention problems</li> </ul> |
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### Overdose and death is rare but can occur if you have too many MDMA pills or an allergic reaction. Symptoms can include:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Irrational behaviour</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very high blood pressure</li> </ul>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vomiting (sometimes people vomit in early stages which, if it passes, is not serious)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hallucinations including a sense of floating</li> <li>• Very high body temperature</li> </ul> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fast heartbeat, palpitations</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collapsing, fainting</li> </ul>   |

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## Long-Term Effects

Studies have shown that some heavy MDMA users experience long-lasting confusion, depression, and selective impairment of working memory and attention. It isn't known whether this occurs only in people who were susceptible to begin with or whether it might happen to anyone who uses MDMA heavily for a long time.

If you use E regularly (e.g. every weekend) you're likely to get emotionally and physically run down; as your natural immunity weakens you become susceptible to infections, colds, flu, etc.

Taking a break from E use should help you regain your emotional and physical wellbeing. NB. Ecstasy can be detected in the urine up to 2 to 4 days after use at common levels.

## Tolerance and dependence

Ecstasy might not be physically addictive but some people do get psychologically addicted to the euphoric effect.

Overseas research suggests people do develop tolerance to ecstasy, with decreasing positive effects of using while the negative effects increase. In other words, the highs get smaller and shorter while the comedowns get harder. Keeping use of E to less than once every 4 - 6 weeks can help reduce both tolerance and chances of long-term negative impact.

## Dehydration and water intoxication

Deaths from E overdoses are very rare but deaths from related dehydration, heat-stroke or water intoxication are more common and can be avoided.

Overheating/hyperthermia is reported to be the most common cause of ecstasy-related death because MDMA interferes with the regulation of body temperature. Symptoms of overheating include vomiting, hallucinations, really fast heartbeat, very high body temperature, dizziness, fainting, head pains and strong muscle cramps. It can cause internal bleeding, and liver and kidney failure.

Drinking large volumes of water at the same time as taking MDMA can lead to 'water intoxication'. Ecstasy triggers the release of ADH, a hormone that slows the action of the kidneys, so rather than excreting fluids you continue to fill up. The symptoms of water intoxication are headache, nausea and vomiting. In rare cases it can cause coma and death due to the blood becoming diluted, low plasma sodium levels, and water being sucked into the brain cells causing increased pressure on the brain stem.

To avoid this, sip – don't gulp - 600ml of water over every hour as gulping water once you are already thirsty can be a risk. Avoid isotonic sports drinks as the potassium in them can increase blood pressure to unsafe levels. Avoid alcohol, caffeine and sugary drinks which increase dehydration. If you're not dancing and not sweating you will not need a lot of fluids.

## Harm Reduction

- No use is the safe choice especially if you are pregnant or breastfeeding as E is likely to cross placenta and end up in breast milk. Heavy use in pregnancy has been found to be associated with delayed motor development in infants.
- E can make you feel in love with a stranger. Remember basic safety issues including safe sex.
- Avoid E if you have heart, liver or kidney problems, epilepsy or asthma.
- Avoid combining with alcohol or mixing drugs because this produces unpredictable effects and is a greater health risk, putting a huge strain on the heart and liver.
- Avoid taking E if you are taking medication such as beta blockers. Consult your doctor about taking E with any medication.
- For diabetics insulin levels can be affected and you may need to monitor blood sugar levels more regularly.
- E can cause a bad reaction if you have an anxiety or psychotic disorder or suffer panic attacks.
- If you're taking more and more to get up, it's safer to take a break for a few months.
- Ecstasy testing kits can reveal what drugs E pills may contain (e.g. dangerous DXM and PMA). However, the tests will not show up all drugs or chemicals present. For more info on what specific pills may contain, see [www.ecstasydata.org](http://www.ecstasydata.org)

## Looking for help?

If you're looking for more information, or maybe want to talk to someone about E or other drug issues for yourself or someone close to you give [Auckland CADS](#) a call on **845-1818**

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