



Ecstasy (MDMA)

E, eckies, biscuits, molly, pingers

Ecstasy can make you feel great, increase your energy and turn total strangers into best friends but there are risks too - especially if you take an unexpectedly strong dose or drink too little or too much water - and it can lead to depression in the long term.

Methylene-Dioxy-Meth-Amphetamine (MDMA) is a phenethylamine with hallucinogenic (trippy) and stimulant (speedy) effects which is available crystal, powder, pills and capsules.

Since the summer of 2018-2019 most of the MDMA tested in NZ has been found to contain genuine MDMA; before then Es in NZ often contained no MDMA at all. Local Es have also been found to contain caffeine, ketamine, speed, and synthetic stimulants including psychedelics, amphetamines and cathinones like n-ethylpentylone and eutylone. These cause paranoia and anxiety and have led to a number of recent hospitalisations. For info about the newer synthetics and analogues see the CADS *Hallucinogens/psychedelics* information sheet and www.drugfoundation.org.nz

KnowYourStuffNZ which tests substances for users warned people (at the time of printing) that some pills contain around three times the 'normal' dose of MDMA. According to the NZ Drug Foundation higher doses of MDMA do not appear to make the high any better but increase the risks of negative side effects and could put the user at serious risk of harm.

Loved up on E (what the drug does)

The effect of E depends on the individual (their size, mood, health, etc), their experience with E or similar drugs, the amount taken and the ingredients in the drug. Different ingredients produce different effects 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
- MDMA increases your heart rate, blood pressure and body temperature. Most people experience the effects in waves and describe it as 'rolling' with the highs and lows leveling out over time.

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 with occasional body rushes. Less intense feelings usually last 4 - 6 hours though some residual effects may last longer.

Common effects of E (MDMA) include:	
• Feelings of energy and euphoria	• Decreased awareness of fatigue, hunger and thirst
• Intensity of feeling confident and happy	• Jaw clenching and/or teeth gritting and grinding
• Increased sense of empathy/ openness or connection with others	• widened pupils, increased body temperature, increased blood pressure and heart rate, increased sweating, and initial anxiety
• Heightened sense of touch	• Dehydration or water retention problems
Overdose and death is rare but can occur if you have too strong a dose or an allergic reaction. Symptoms of overdose can include:	
• Irrational behaviour	• Very high blood pressure
• Vomiting (sometimes people vomit in early stages which, if it passes, is not serious)	• Hallucinations including a sense of floating
• Fast heartbeat, palpitations	• Very high body temperature
	• Collapsing, fainting
The comedown effects of E (MDMA) include:	
• Low energy and mood / anxiety	• Sweaty and irritable
• Difficulty sleeping and concentrating	• Upset stomach

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Long-Term Effects

Some people who use a lot of MDMA experience long-lasting confusion, depression, and impaired memory and attention. It isn't known whether this occurs only in people who were susceptible to begin with or whether it can happen to anyone who uses MDMA heavily for a long time.

Regular E use (e.g. every weekend) means you're likely to get emotionally and physically run down because your natural immunity weakens making you 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 a tolerance to MDMA, with the highs getting smaller and shorter while the comedowns get harder. Using E less than once every 4 - 6 weeks can help reduce tolerance and the chances of long-term negative effects.

Dehydration and water intoxication

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

MDMA doesn't directly dehydrate you. It raises your body temperature - especially important if you're already in a hot club environment—which in turn causes you to sweat and lose fluids. If you don't drink fluids and cool your body temperature you're at risk of hyperthermia or heatstroke and if you're not replacing fluids you'll likely become dehydrated.

- 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.

- 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.
- **Sip** – don't gulp – no more than 500ml of water every hour. 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.
- Even if you don't feel the urge make sure you urinate regularly. By being aware and keeping track of your water intake, you can avoid most of the risks of both dehydration and over hydration.

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

We recommend you avoid E if:

- you have heart, liver or kidney problems, epilepsy or asthma
- you are taking medication such as beta blockers. Consult your doctor about taking E with any medication
- you are diabetic as insulin levels can be affected and you may need to monitor blood sugar levels more regularly
- you have an anxiety or psychotic disorder or suffer panic attacks
- you are drinking alcohol or using other drugs because the effects are unpredictable and may put a huge strain on your heart and liver
- you're taking more and more to get up. Take a break for a few months.

E can make you feel in love with a stranger. Remember basic safety issues including safe sex

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

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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