

# Facts about Ecstasy

## E, eckies, biscuits, molly, pingers

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

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

## Harms associated with Ecstasy

Although most of the MDMA tested in NZ has been found to contain genuine MDMA some substances sold locally as MDMA contain caffeine, ketamine, speed, and synthetic stimulants including psychedelics, amphetamines and synthetic cathinones (bath salts). These can have unpleasant and unpredictable effects and have led to several hospitalisations in NZ in the last few years. For info about the newer synthetics and analogues see the CADS *Hallucinogens/ psychedelics* information sheet and [MDMA - The Level](#)

Some people who use a lot of MDMA experience long-lasting confusion, depression, and impaired memory and attention. It's not 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 so you become susceptible to infections, colds, flu, etc. Take a break from E use to 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.

## Reducing the harms

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 are:

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

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

Use drug checking services to find out what's in your E. If you can't get to drug checking services, use a reagent test. For more info on what specific pills may contain, see [www.ecstasydata.org](http://www.ecstasydata.org)

## 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 because 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 levelling 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 connection to 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:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Decreased awareness of fatigue, hunger and thirst</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Feelings of energy, euphoria, confidence and happiness</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Jaw clenching and/or teeth gritting and grinding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Heightened sense of touch</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>widened pupils, increased body temperature, increased blood pressure and heart rate, increased sweating, and initial anxiety</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased sense of empathy/ openness or connection with others</li> <li>Dehydration or water retention problems</li> </ul>
Overdose and death is rare but can occur with too strong a dose or allergic reaction. Symptoms of OD can include:	
<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>
The comedown effects of E (MDMA) include:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Low energy and mood / anxiety</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sweaty and irritable</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Difficulty sleeping and concentrating</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Upset stomach</li> </ul>

## 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 and the comedowns get more uncomfortable. 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

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

MDMA 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. Drink fluids and cool your body temperature to reduce the risk of hyperthermia or heatstroke. Without 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 be sure to urinate regularly. By being aware and keeping track of your water intake, you can avoid most of the risks of both dehydration and overhydration.

## 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 0800 845-1818

For confidential advice, support or information contact Alcohol & Drug Helpline on 0800-787-797 10am to 10pm daily