

Facts about Hallucinogens/ Psychedelics

The terms 'hallucinogens' and 'psychedelics' are used to describe a wide variety of psychoactive substances that affect all the senses and produce feelings of unreality – seeing and hearing things that do not exist - and distorting perceptions of your emotions, thoughts and sense of time.

Synthetic or laboratory-made hallucinogens became popular in Western cultures in the 1960s though there are plants with hallucinogenic properties which have been used for thousands of years by many cultures for mystical and spiritual purposes.

In New Zealand the use, possession or supply of any hallucinogenic drug is an offence and can carry fines and/or prison sentences. For more info see <https://thelevel.org.nz>

Harms associated with hallucinogens

The effects can be unpredictable and differ from person to person 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 (for example, on your own or with friends at a party). Some people will have a pleasant experience while others will not. And while you may have had a good experience one time that doesn't mean the next time will be the same.

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.

It is hard to predict the strength and effects of psychedelics (even if you have taken them before), as the strength and potency can vary from batch to batch.

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.

Regular use of NBOMe has the biggest impact on mental health, which can cause psychosis, paranoia, anxiety, depression, memory loss, personality changes, hallucinogen persisting perception disorder (HPPD) and more.

As NBOMe drugs are new, there is very little research on them. However, it is suggested that they could also cause kidney problems, brain bleeds and damage, high white blood cell count, weak muscles and movement problems.

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.

Reducing the harms

- 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
- 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 it can be difficult to differentiate between what is real and what isn't and the distorted perception of time and space can result in injury to self 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 and your mood is good
- Avoid taking LSD if you are upset, feeling low or insecure--this could lead to a bad trip
- Avoid taking more. Start low and go slow because the effects can take a while to come on and will get stronger
- If feeling anxious sit somewhere quiet and take deep, regular breaths. Avoid flashing lights and visuals. Ask a friend to stay with you
- Make sure you know what you are using. Use reagent tests or head to a drug checking clinic to make sure you're not about to take something unexpected especially if you've acquired it through people you don't know and trust.

Types of hallucinogens and their effects

LSD (lysergic acid diethylamide)

LSD is colourless, tasteless and odourless and usually comes as squares of gelatine or blotting paper (tabs) though may also come as a liquid, tablets, capsules, or sugar cubes. The effects begin within 20-60 minutes, peak at 3 - 5 hours, and can last for up to 12-15 hours (though the quality of LSD can vary hugely meaning the effects may be shorter or longer).

The most common effects of tripping on LSD are heightened sensory experiences, distorted feelings of time and space, a distorted awareness of your body, unstable emotions and more intense thinking. A 'bad trip' is when the experience is dominated by negative feelings and anxiety. Physically, people may experience nausea, increased heart rate and blood pressure, variations in body temperature, sweating and shakiness.

N-BOMe (N-Benzyl-Oxy-Methyl aka N-bomb, smiles, smiley paper)

These drugs are powerful hallucinogens; a very small amount has an effect so it is really easy to overdose. Overseas there have been deaths linked to NBOMe. NBOMe is sometimes sold as LSD because, like LSD, they come on blotting paper (tabs) and in pills, liquid or powder. A few NBOMe have properties similar to amphetamines.

The effects of NBOMe are unpredictable and can include hallucinations, euphoria, feeling relaxed and empathetic. Effects may also include extreme agitation, feeling disoriented, really 'speedy' and paranoid. According to local news reports it has taken 4 people to restrain violently agitated users. Physically, NBOMe users may experience teeth grinding, rapid heartbeat, dizziness, sweating or shivering, tremors, diarrhoea, nausea and vomiting.

Magic mushrooms (psilocybin aka shrooms, blue meanies, mushies)

Magic mushrooms are non-poisonous fungi which can be eaten or drunk in a tea. The fungi contain psilocybin and other chemicals which make them hallucinogenic. The effects generally start within 15 - 45 minutes and last for 4 - 6 hours. The most common effects are a feeling of happiness, connectedness, energy, relaxation, mild hallucinations which can feel 'spiritual' – all of which increase with larger doses, and which may become unpleasant. Physically people can experience headaches, increased or irregular heartbeat, sweating, chills, and nausea and vomiting.

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

The thorn apple and angel's trumpet are tall shrubs with hanging, trumpet-shaped flowers and are two of the most dangerous plants in Aotearoa. Datura is sometimes eaten by people wanting to experience hallucinations caused by the plant's powerful alkaloid chemicals. However the plants have other effects which can cause serious medical conditions or death; they can over-stimulate the heart, act as powerful muscle relaxant, and cause kidney damage and/or kidney failure because of the strong diuretic effect. Some users have reported losing their sight for a couple of days, along with fear, paranoia/panic and an inability to concentrate. Locally datura has been responsible for a number of admissions to intensive care and has indirectly caused at least two deaths from drowning.

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

Mescaline (from the peyote cactus)

Mescaline can be a powder, tablet, capsule or liquid. Peyote buttons can be chewed. The effects begin within 1 - 2 hours of taking the drug and can last between 10 - 18 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. Physical effects include vomiting, headaches and anxiety.

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.