

Ecstasy

What is ecstasy?

'Ecstasy' is the street term commonly used for tablets containing MDMA, or 3, 4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine. It possesses both stimulant and hallucinogenic properties.

Tablets are the most common form and may come in a variety of colours and sizes. Tablets may be branded with a design or logo. Despite this identification, there is no reliable method of determining the quality of the drug, since pills with the same stamp can vary widely in the content of MDMA and other substances.

Tablets sold as ecstasy can contain a wide variety of substances that are not MDMA. These can include methamphetamine or ketamine, as well as other substances which are part of the same phenethylamine family, such as 3,4-methylenedioxyamphetamine (MDA), para-methoxyamphetamine (PMA) or 3,4-methylenedioxyethylamphetamine (MDEA). They may also contain legal substances such as caffeine.



How many people use ecstasy?

According to the 2013 [National Drug Strategy Household Survey \(NDSHS\)](#), ecstasy is the second most commonly used illicit drug in Australia with 2.5% of people aged 14 years or older using ecstasy in the previous 12 months. However, ecstasy use has seen a decline since 2007, when 3.5% people reported recent use.

More than one in 10 Australians aged 14 or older has reported using ecstasy at some point in their lives.

- Consistent with previous waves of the NDSHS, in 2013, the 20 to 29 year age group had the highest proportion of reported use in the past 12 months (8.6%).
- More males aged 20 to 29 years (10.6%) reported past 12 month use than females aged 20 to 29 years (6.6%).
- Proportions among the 14 to 19 year age group reporting past 12 month ecstasy use remains low at 3%.

According to the Australian secondary school students' use of tobacco, alcohol, and over-the-counter and illicit substances in 2011 report, 2.7% of secondary school students said they used ecstasy at some time in their life, and 2% have used ecstasy in the past year.

The proportion of students ever using ecstasy increased with age, from 1% among 13-year-olds to 6% among 17-year-olds.

Key findings from the 2016 [Ecstasy and Related Drugs Reporting System \(EDRS\)](#), which surveys regular psychostimulant users every year to determine trends in the market, point to a significant return of the ecstasy market in Australia, which only six years ago was shrinking due to lack of purity and difficulty obtaining the drug.

The EDRS also found that nearly 60 per cent of users took ecstasy in a high purity crystal form.

What are the effects?

The short-term effects of ecstasy include:

- **euphoria** and a feeling of well-being
- increased feelings of **intimacy** with others
- **confidence** and a **lack of inhibition**
- **nausea, sweating, increased blood pressure** and pulse rate
- **jaw clenching** and **teeth grinding**

What are the risks?

There are a number of risks associated with ecstasy use.

Risks may include:

- Involuntary **jaw clenching** and **teeth grinding**. This can lead to dental issues if used heavily/regularly
- **Unpleasant after-effects** (the 'comedown' phase)
- **Increased heart rate and blood pressure**. This is extremely dangerous for people with pre-existing problems, such as high blood pressure or cardiovascular (heart) disease. This risk is greater when used with other drugs that have stimulant effects, such as methamphetamine
- **Nausea and vomiting**
- **Dehydration and overheating** if taken in a hot or humid environment, such as a club or dance party, especially if the user is moving around a lot. This can lead to serious consequences, such as kidney failure for users if they don't drink enough water; drinking too much water can also be dangerous
- **Anxiety and panic attacks**
- **Insomnia**
- **Tremors/shakes, convulsions**
- **Immunosuppression** (the body's ability to fight infection is lowered)
- Possible **dependence** (addiction) for some people
- **Serotonin syndrome** – this can be life-threatening
- **Psychosis** (a serious mental illness that causes people to misinterpret or confuse reality)
- **Stroke**

If the pills being taken contain other substances (e.g. PMA or methamphetamine), the user may also experience the negative effects of those drugs. Whether a person is a first-time, occasional or regular user, one of the major risks is that the effects of illegal drugs are unpredictable, and users can never be sure what they're taking.

Longer-term effects associated with ecstasy are still debated. It is possible that some people may be more prone to developing long-term problems than others.

Some studies have linked ecstasy with:

- **Damage to serotonin levels in the brain** (low serotonin levels are associated with depression). Whether this puts ecstasy users at a greater risk of long-term depression is the subject of debate by researchers
- **Impairments to memory and attention**
- **Liver problems**

People who use ecstasy can develop a tolerance to the drug. This means that users may require a higher dose of the drug to get the same effect. This increases the risks of experiencing negative consequences.

