

Ecstasy

The Difference is Research

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; in recent times, brands such as Mitsubishi and Calvin Klein have been found stamped on ecstasy tablets. 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?

Australian general population

According to the 2010 National Drug Strategy Household Survey, ecstasy is the second most commonly used illicit drug in Australia with 3% of people aged 14 years or older using ecstasy in the previous 12 months.

However, for the first time since 1995 there has been a decline in the recent use of ecstasy. 10% of the Australian population aged 14 or older has reported using ecstasy at some point in their lives.

- Those aged 20-29 years had the highest proportion reporting use in the past 12 months (9.9%) compared to other age groups. One in four in this age group reported ever having used ecstasy.
- Males aged 20-29 years had the highest proportion reporting use in the past 12 months (11.4%) compared to every other group.
- The recent use (past 12 months) of ecstasy among female teenagers aged 14-19 years fell to 2.5% in 2010 from 6.0% in 2007. Females now report less recent use of ecstasy than their male counterparts – reversing the situation from 2007 when more females than males in that age group reported recent use of ecstasy. Overall the use of ecstasy in the 14-19 year age group fell from 5% in 2007 to 2.8% in 2010.

Australian secondary school students

According to the 2008 Australian Secondary Students Alcohol and Drug Survey, 4.1% of secondary school students reported having used ecstasy some time in their life and 3.5% have used ecstasy in the past year.

The proportion of students ever using ecstasy increased with age, from 0.9% of 12 year olds to 9.0% of 17 year olds.

Of the 3.5% who reported using ecstasy in the past year, 42% of males and 56% of females had used it only once or twice.

Short term 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.

Long term effects

Little is known about the long term effects of ecstasy. Some long-term users have been seen to experience depression and some memory and cognitive impairment.

According to the 2010 National Household Survey, recent users of ecstasy were more likely to have reported having a mental illness than those not using the drug (16.2% and 11.9% respectively) and were also more likely to report high levels of psychological distress.

