

What it looks like

Pure ecstasy is a white powder.

Ecstasy sold on the street is usually in tablet form, although it's sometimes sold as powder. Ecstasy tablets come in all sorts of colours and some of them have pictures or logos stamped into them.

How it's taken

Ecstasy is usually taken as a tablet but some people do snort ecstasy powder.

What it does

Ecstasy gives people an energy buzz that makes them feel alert and alive. It makes people feel in tune with their surroundings. Sounds, colours and emotions feel more intense.

Ecstasy dilates the pupils of the eyes (makes them larger), produces a tingling feeling, tightens the jaw muscles, raises the body temperature and makes the heart beat faster.

How long the effects last

The effects kick in between 20 and 60 minutes after taking the drug and tend to last between three to six hours, followed by a gradual comedown.

People have been known to take another tablet because they haven't felt the effects of the first. The danger then is that both tablets start to work and you have a double dose to deal with.

Addiction Ecstasy is not addictive, but you may build up a 'tolerance'. This means that you have to take more and more to get the same buzz. You may also develop a psychological dependence. This is where you crave ecstasy and get distressed without it.

Risks

Dangers

In the UK there have been deaths related to ecstasy. Ecstasy can cause the body's temperature to rise to dangerously high levels.

Add to that a sweaty dance floor and dehydration and there's the potential for 'double heatstroke'. This is why users are usually advised to drink a pint of water every hour. They are also encouraged to:

- have the odd sugary drink and salty snack;
- take regular breaks to cool down;
- wear loose clothing.

The people who make ecstasy often mix in cheaper substances such as amphetamine and caffeine, as well as other things that would be more at home under your kitchen sink. Ecstasy can contain poisonous chemicals like MPTP, a drug known to cause Parkinson's disease. Some deaths have been linked to other drugs that have been passed off as ecstasy.

Taking ecstasy with alcohol or other drugs puts an extra strain on your liver and kidneys.

Physical effects

Short-term effects can include anxiety, panic attacks, confusion, epileptic fits and paranoia. Long-term use has been shown to cause depression, personality changes and memory loss. Some evidence suggests it can also damage the brain, causing long-term problems.

Ecstasy causes tiredness and dehydration, which can lead to urine infections like cystitis in women. Anyone with a heart condition, high blood pressure, epilepsy or asthma should steer well clear, as they can have a very dangerous reaction to the drug. If you suffer from a mental illness, the best advice is to avoid ecstasy altogether.



What to do in an emergency

Don't delay – phone 999 immediately.

If you think someone has overdosed on drugs, tell the operator what drugs they've taken (if you know).

What not to do

- Don't cause pain or another injury.
- Don't give them other drugs.
- Don't put them in a shower or bath.
- Don't walk them around.
- Don't leave them on their own.

Always follow the operator's instructions.

And remember, if you have any doubt always call 999. It could save the person's life.

What the law says

Ecstasy is a classified drug. For the current classification and information about the consequences of using and supplying ecstasy, go to www.knowthescore.info.

Fact: by law, passing drugs to someone else, including friends, is classed as supplying.

Fact: some countries may refuse visas to people who have drug convictions.

Getting more information

You can get more information by phoning the free and confidential 'Know the Score' information line on **0800 587 587 9**. Someone is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Calls from landlines are free and will not show up on the phone bill. Or, you can visit the 'Know the Score' website www.knowthescore.info.

Both the information line and the website can provide information about local services. Also, you can ask your GP to refer you to a specialist drugs service. To find a drug service in your area visit www.scottishdrugservices.com.

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