



ECSTASY

What is it?

Ecstasy may be classed, in drugs terms, as a hallucinogenic amphetamine, usually available in a variety of home-made capsules or tablets which are taken by mouth.

Legal status

The manufacture, sale and use are illegal and 'E' tablets are made in backstreet laboratories by amateur chemists.

What's it called?

The chemical name is Methylenedioxyethylamphetamine, (MDMA), known as 'E', 'XTC', 'Edward', 'Essence', 'Love Doves', 'Disco Biscuits', 'Denis the Menace', 'Shamrock' – and many other names.

Why it's taken?

Ecstasy is usually taken at 'raves' or at discos to produce a feeling of relaxation with increased energy, happiness and flexibility. Someone using Ecstasy may feel less inhibited, experience everything more intensely, feel mellow and calm. It can bring a sense of vulnerability. Ecstasy takes effect in 20 – 60 minutes, usually is at its height for about 2 hours and can last several hours after that.

The 'E' scene

Ecstasy was originally a 'feel good' drug in the US fifteen or so years ago. It's closely associated with 'rave' dance parties and the music that goes with them. Endurance dancing, which can last all night, has become a status measurement – and the use of Ecstasy can be part of this.

Taking any stimulant increases body temperature. The hot atmosphere of a dance floor and the dancing itself raises it again, so that 'ravers'

start losing fluid (dehydrating). They need to take a pint of fluid (not alcohol – it also dehydrates) per hour to avoid heatstroke which has killed Ecstasy users here and in other countries. This is best done by sipping no more than a pint of water, fruit juices or isotonic drink in any one hour.

Ecstasy-Plus

Less than half the drugs brought as Ecstasy are pure 'E'. The rest are 'Snidey', i.e. a combination of MDMA and any range of substances. Many 'E' tablets are cut with other stimulant drugs such as amphetamine sulphate. Others are cut with hallucinogenic drugs such as LSD, or perhaps a mixture of both.

Most worrying of the substances being used as 'mixers' are anaesthetics such as 'Ketamine' and depressant drugs such as barbiturates. Barbiturates are very dangerous, especially when used with alcohol. So any 'E' tablet./capsule may be an experiment with the unknown.

Short term effects

These may include intense sweating, dry mouth, loss of appetite, increase in heart rate and blood pressure, nausea, and sometimes pain and stiffness in arms, legs and jaws. This pressure on the heart and respiratory system can kill after a single dose. Anyone suffering from epilepsy, diabetes, asthma or pre-existing heart disease is particularly vulnerable to having symptoms brought on suddenly with severe consequences.

Long term effects

These can include insomnia, lethargy, anorexia and weight loss. Although it does not on its own produce major hallucinogenic effects this may happen if it is mixed (or 'cut') with other substances such as Ketamine (an anaesthetic). Other effects may include psychiatric problems such as depression, anxiety and panic attacks. Liver problems can be caused or made worse by 'E'. Although Ecstasy is not physically addictive, users may become psychologically dependent on the drug. Studies in animals indicate the possibility of brain damage but it is not yet known whether humans can be affected in this way.

To sum up . . .

When Ecstasy was introduced to the UK and to Ireland, it was 'sold' as the perfect weekend party stimulant, a 90's drug that you could use to get your kicks at the weekend and go back to work on Monday as bright as a button. As the dance drug market has expanded, and the

amount of other substances being added to MDMA is increased, the threat of death and other serious consequences from the use of Ecstasy increase also.

Glossary

Drug

A substance which alters the way in which the body functions

Dependent

This word has replaced the word addiction. Dependence can be:

- Physical: a person tolerant to a drug would experience withdrawal symptoms if usage is reduced or ended.
- Psychological: a person is unable to function emotionally without the use of a drug.

Effects

Effects of a particular drug on the individual will be influenced by a variety of factors, such as how much has been taken before, tolerance levels, the amount taken, the mood, expectations of what might happen and the reactions of others. Therefore it may be misleading to say that 'drug A will always cause B'.

Intoxication

The body has more of a drug than it can cope with.

Overdose

Taking a quantity of a drug to which the body has not built up a tolerance leading to severe illness or death

Tolerance

Describes the way the body adapts to repeated doses of a drug, so increasingly large amounts are needed to maintain the same effects.

Depressant

Drug which slows down the action of the brain and body systems.

Stimulant

Drug which speeds up or stimulates the brain or body systems. It makes the user feel confident, powerful, important or assertive.

Amphetamine

Stimulants, usually an off white/yellow bitter tasting crystalline powder. They are illegal and are not normally available on prescription in Ireland.

Gram

Common measurement for weighing drugs.

Further help

Further help is available from:

Family Doctor, Pharmacist, Health Board, Community Addiction Counsellor, Public Health Nurse, Social Workers, Garda Siochana, Clergy or Probation Officers.

Drug Treatment Center Board
30-31 Pearse Street
Dublin 2
Tel: 01-6771122

Drug Awareness Programme Cross Care
Clonliffe College,
Dublin 3
Tel: 01-8360911