

Aisha's story

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I like to go out and dance at the weekend, and a big part of that is taking ecstasy. When I'm dancing on pingers it makes me feel really loving and happy, I feel really close to everyone in the club. Sometimes the start of a week is a struggle after a big weekend, but if I look after myself I usually come good in a couple of days. I wish it was easier to know what was in a pill, or how strong it's going to be - it's so hard to know whether you're going to get a good one or not. I've taken amazing pills, I've taken ones that did nothing, and I've had some really awful ones which I think had other stuff in them - I felt like I was pinned to the floor, I couldn't really move, I felt really heavy. And they were really trippy too - I was having mad hallucinations and it felt pretty out of control. I think a lot of these new drugs that are being created aren't as good as Ecstasy and it's really hard to know what you're going to end up with."

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Ecstasy

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about

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Facts about Ecstasy

3,4 MethyleneDioxyMethAmphetamine (MDMA) is a crystalline powder, while **ecstasy** is the name generally given to MDMA in pill form.

While you may associate ecstasy with doof music, it's actually been around since about 1912. After being discovered by German company Merck, it lay forgotten for many years, before an American biochemist named Shulgin rediscovered it. It was used in the US in the late 70s and early 80s by some psychoanalysts (as well as recreationally) before being declared illegal in the US in 1984 and in Australia in 1986. But of course, that hasn't stopped people using ecstasy.

Ecstasy works by affecting serotonin (the 'feel good' neurotransmitter) levels in the brain, with users reporting feelings of euphoria, emotional openness, compassion and connection with the world and others around them. This may be followed by a 'crash' period, caused by depleted serotonin levels in the brain. During this time, people can feel drained, irritable and depressed.

The purity of ecstasy/MDMA can vary greatly, and some pills sold as ecstasy can contain a number of other substances.

Ecstasy is generally thought of as one of the first of the 'new generation' synthetic drugs, but there are now many new and emerging psychoactive substances (EPS) that produce a range of effects.

Remember: using other drugs (including alcohol) with ecstasy or EPS can cause their effects to be more unpredictable and increase the risk of overdose.

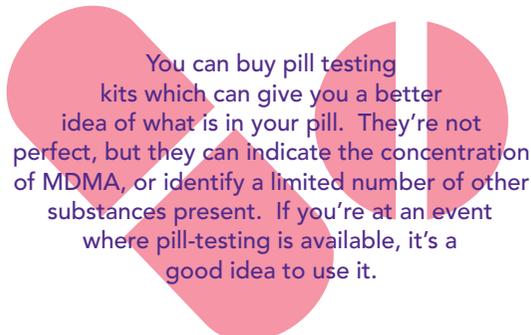
Facts about Emerging Psychoactive Substances (EPS)

EPS are also called 'new psychoactive substances' (or NPS), 'legal highs' (even though many of them are not legal) or 'synthetics'. Many of these substances mimic the effects of other drugs such as **ecstasy, LSD, cannabis & amphetamine, and there are new ones being produced all the time.**

Some pills sold as ecstasy actually contain some of these new psychoactive substances, and whilst their effects can be similar to ecstasy, they are often unpredictable. This unpredictability has led to increased harm (including several fatalities) in Australia and world-wide.

There are a number of reasons for this:

- While there has been extensive research done around the effects of ecstasy, many psychoactive substances are rushed onto the market quickly in an attempt to sell them before they are legislated against. It's hard to know how they will affect people as they have not been widely used.
- Because some of their effects are similar to other psychoactive drugs, people tend to use them in the same way – for example many people take large doses of the ecstasy-like substance MDA, not realizing that taking a similar dose to that they would take of ecstasy can lead to overdose with MDA.



You can buy pill testing kits which can give you a better idea of what is in your pill. They're not perfect, but can indicate the concentration of MDMA, or identify a limited number of other substances present. If you're at an event where pill-testing is available, it's a good idea to use it.

Reducing the Harms

While the best way to avoid harm from Ecstasy and emerging psychoactive substances is to not use them, there are things you can do to reduce risk:

Plan Ahead

- If you know you are going to be using ecstasy or EPS, think about how it is going to affect you, how you can minimise the side effects, whether there will be people with you who will notice if something goes wrong and how you're going to get home safely afterwards. If you're planning to use, don't plan to drive.
- Make sure you are rested before you use. Avoid using when you are sick. Eat well in the lead-up to using. Plan to have some time to crash, rest and replenish with healthy food after your period of use.

Use with care

- Even if you are used to taking a certain substance, start slowly. Some EPS that mimic Ecstasy take longer to start affecting you than Ecstasy. Many people think their first pill isn't working, then take another ('double dropping'), doubling their dose and increasing their risk of overdose. Don't make this mistake.

Look after each other

- If you are worried about a friend, call an ambulance straight away. Due to the nature of Ecstasy and EPS, if people start to have problems, they will need immediate medical support. Signs to look out for can include: headache, fever or losing consciousness, nausea and vomiting (many people vomit when they 'come up' on a pill, but prolonged vomiting after this is not normal), muscle spasms or abnormal heartbeat, inability to sweat or urinate, confusion and impaired judgement.
- Given the lack of established knowledge about these new substances, it can be difficult for medical staff to know how to treat someone who has overdosed on or has health problems caused by EPS. Treatment could be quicker and more effective if you can advise exactly what has been taken and the dosage. For 'legal highs', supplying the packet might be helpful.