



ECSTASY USE

An Information Guide for Parents and Youth Workers

A close-up photograph of two white, bean-shaped pills resting on a dark, textured surface. A pile of white powder is scattered in front of the pills. The title 'WHAT IS ECSTASY?' is overlaid in large, white, bold, sans-serif capital letters, framed by two horizontal white bars.

WHAT IS ECSTASY?

Ecstasy is a recreational drug often used at house parties, raves, or nightclubs. Ecstasy is commonly referred to as MDMA and also known as love drug, X, XTC, Adam, Eve, party pill, or hug beans.

A synthetic drug that comes in small capsules or tablets with unique designs and bright colors, it is packaged to attract users. Ecstasy may also be in the form of crystals or powder packets that can be dissolved in drinks. It is difficult to tell what ingredients may be contained in ecstasy since it is often mixed with other toxic chemicals.

What's in a typical tablet or capsule?

There is no typical ecstasy tablet. Even though pills may have the same stamp and color, it is rare for any two batches of pills to contain the similar quality, quantity, and type of ingredients. Ecstasy is made in illegal labs using a wide variety of chemicals so the actual contents of any specific ecstasy pill depends entirely on the type of ingredients that criminals can get their hands on. In other words, regardless of what others may think, you can never be sure what ecstasy contains.



What effect does ecstasy have?

Ecstasy can produce feelings of increased energy and alertness, euphoria, empathy, emotional warmth, suppressed appetite, and distortions of time and perception. The effects from ecstasy are often referred to as “rolling” because of the undulating emotions that users feel. Ecstasy's effect may be reached in less than one hour and last from 3-6 hours. While its sensation may be enticing, a range of serious negative physical, physiological, and psychological effects can result from using this drug.



How common is ecstasy use?

Ecstasy is an aspect of youth culture that is becoming too widespread. Following alcohol and marijuana use, ecstasy is the third most common drug used by Canadian youth aged 12-18 years old. The age at which youth first tend to experiment with ecstasy is between 16 to 23 years old. However, the highest rate of use tends to occur among those 18 to 25 years of age.

In Canada, the provinces with the highest ecstasy use rates in 2009 were Saskatchewan and British Columbia. While only a small proportion of people use Ecstasy, young people have the higher rates of use. For example, 3.4% to 7.2% of Grade 7 to 12 youth said they had used ecstasy in the last 12 months. A Vancouver study indicated that as many as 35% of youth reported that they had experimented with ecstasy.

Males have a higher likelihood of abusing or developing a dependence on ecstasy. However, females are not only more likely to use ecstasy than males, but females tend to begin using this drug at an earlier age than males. A recent study of European youth found ecstasy users to be more likely female, living in urban areas, and coming from dysfunctional, socially disadvantaged, or broken families. These females were also more likely to attend an alternative school and be poly-drug users.

Why is ecstasy use a problem?

Ecstasy mimics stimulants and hallucinogenic drugs, and affects many of the body's systems in ways similar to cocaine or methamphetamine. Ecstasy changes the way the brain and body works, including increasing the heart rate and blood pressure. Using ecstasy is even riskier when it is mixed with other substances, if someone is pregnant, or if it is used to self-medicate against a mental illness.

Unfortunately, many drugs are passed off or sold as ecstasy, but are often mixed with other dangerous drugs, such as ketamine and methamphetamine. More recently, so-called 'ecstasy' pills have been mixed with a highly toxic chemical, PMMA (para-methoxymethamphetamine), which can cause death with just one use. From 2010 to 2012, there were at least 22 deaths in British Columbia and Alberta caused by PMMA in pills sold as 'ecstasy'. The problem with PMMA is that it takes longer to be felt by the user and, as a result, youth may take more of the drug to get the desired effect. However, this strategy can lead to an overdose.

It is critical to keep in mind that there is no safe dose of ecstasy. It is a particularly risky drug to consume since one can never be sure what is in a pill or safely predict how the body will react to a combination of chemicals.

How does someone look and act when they are on ecstasy?

| LOOK | ACT |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dilated Pupils• Sweaty and thirsty• Hyper-alert• Clenched Jaw• Overheated while reporting feeling cold | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Heightened emotional responses (more open & empathic than usual)• Hallucinate• Fatigued• Agitated• High Energy |

How else might ecstasy affect someone while under its influence?

- Feelings of Affection
- Sense of Well-being
- Brain Swelling, Seizures
- Muscle Tension
- Nausea, Vomiting
- Chills, Sweating, Faintness
- Suppressed Appetite
- Involuntary Teeth Clenching
- Blurred Vision
- Headache
- Increased Heart Rate and Blood Pressure

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Ecstasy can also cause hyperthermia. Hyperthermia is a dangerous rise in body temperature causing seizures, blood clots, and kidney and liver damage. Some believe that drinking water helps prevent the body from overheating but it can actually cause serious problems, including headaches, vomiting, water intoxication, and, in extreme cases, brain swelling leading to possible death.

Under the influence of ecstasy, youth are also more vulnerable to unhealthy sexual activity, including being the victim of a sexual assault. This is because of decreased inhibitions and artificial feelings of closeness that result from taking ecstasy.

How does ecstasy affect the brain?

Ecstasy interferes with the brain's normal functioning and natural production of certain chemicals. For example, ecstasy causes brain chemicals like serotonin, which is largely responsible for mood, to rise while under the use of ecstasy, and then drop to potentially dangerous levels in the days following use.



How might ecstasy affect someone after use?

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Panic attacks
- Confusion
- Mood swings
- Memory Loss
- Sleep problems
- Irritation
- Suicidal thoughts
- Learning problems

In the days following ecstasy use, altered chemical levels in the brain can lead to the above symptoms that may continue for days. Though these 'downs' are often temporary, they may become severe enough to cause serious and long lasting health problems over time.

How can someone tell if a person has overdosed on ecstasy?

A person requires immediate assistance if they display any one of the following signs:

- Trouble breathing or not breathing at all
- Cold skin
- Blue lips
- Throwing up
- Over heating
- Trouble waking up

IF YOU SUSPECT OVERDOSE OR SEE EVIDENCE OF A BAD REACTION, DIAL 9-1-1 IMMEDIATELY. DO NOT LEAVE THE PERSON ALONE.



What makes ecstasy such a desirable drug for some youth?

Young people may be attracted to use ecstasy because they believe it will enhance the party experience or their mood. Some use ecstasy believing it improves their ability to social with others. Others use it to boost the effects of other drugs, increase energy, or experience intoxication and euphoria, while others use it to increase physical alertness (especially college students).

Some young people rely on ecstasy as a short-term anti-depressant, but risk developing a physical or psychological dependence on the drug in seeking to get the same high they had when they first tried it. In particular, young people who have experienced stress or trauma have a higher tendency to use ecstasy as a way to self-medicate. Abused children are especially at risk for using ecstasy into adulthood. A high proportion of youth admit to using ecstasy as a way to cope with stress and have affirmed that it was a friend or partner who introduced them to the drug.

Females may experiment with ecstasy due to its appetite-suppressing qualities. One study found that girls who had used ecstasy consistently within a one-year period were more likely to have unhealthy weight control practices, such as vomiting and laxative use.

A general lack of awareness about the health risks of using ecstasy, along with its social acceptability, affordability (as low as \$5 per pill), and ease of access have contributed to ecstasy becoming a drug of choice for certain youth.

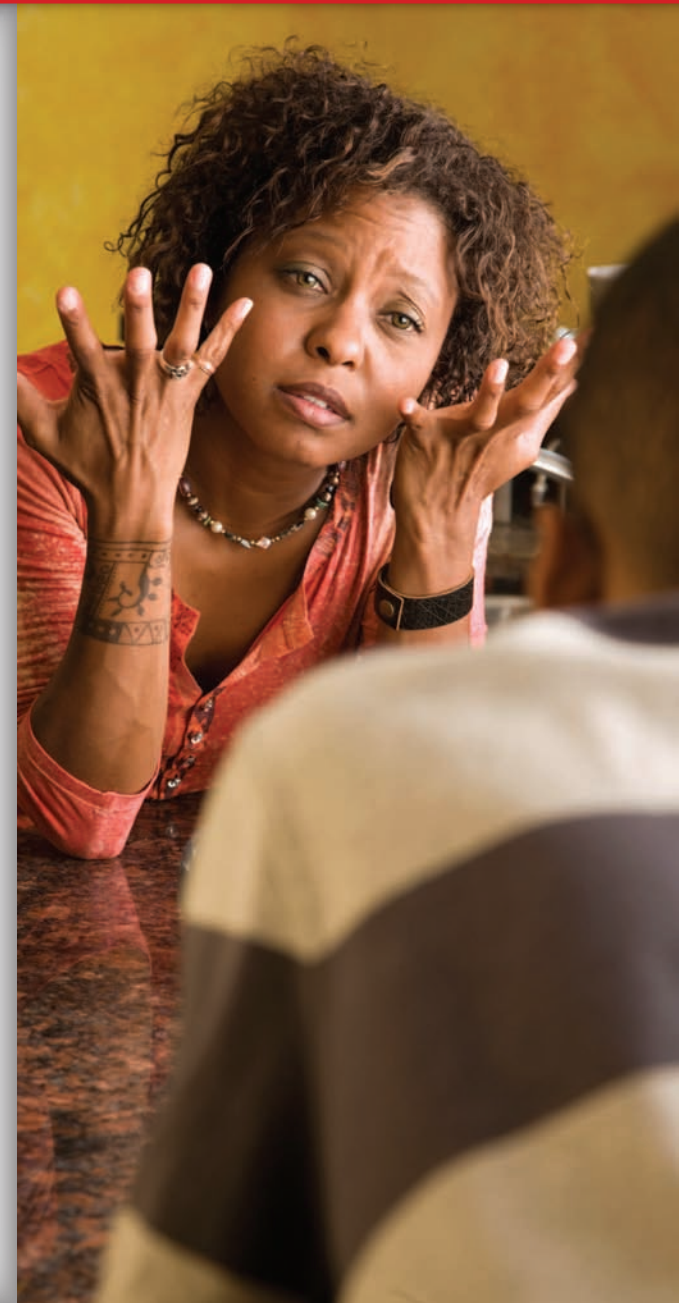
How does ecstasy use affect youth at school and the community?

Ecstasy, marijuana, alcohol, and tobacco use are all associated with low academic achievement. Young people who use ecstasy also tend to have poorer relationships with caregivers, a negative attitude about school, skip classes more often, receive more detentions, fight more frequently, and have more negative dealings with school staff.

Ecstasy users are more likely to engage in deviant behavior, including having more negative contact with the police and courts. This may be because ecstasy contributes to high-risk activities and ecstasy users may be under the influence of a combination of drugs.

What can parents and caregivers do to help prevent children from using drugs like ecstasy?

Developing and maintaining positive, healthy, and active relationships with children from a young age sets the stage for children to feel comfortable discussing a variety of topics with adults. It also offers a way to build resiliency against negative influences that youth may encounter as they mature. A warm and open family environment is built when children's achievements are recognized, self-esteem is nurtured, boundaries are firm yet fair, and when children are not judged for raising questions and concerns.



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Regularly discussing a variety of subjects up to and through adolescence reduces the occurrence of children looking to find answers from unreliable source that place them at greater risk for drug experimentation. For example, families can develop on-going conversations about general health and safety that can include talking about drug use.

It is important for parents to educate themselves about illicit drug use from reliable sources. This brings credibility and can provide opportunities to redirect misconceptions about drugs and alcohol. For example, parents can engage with their children in a variety of ways:

- In a non-judgmental, open-ended way, parents can ask their child what they think about drugs or hold a conversation about the dangers of driving while under the influence of drugs and alcohol
- Have a conversation about the effects of drugs on the body
- Have a conversation about legal issues including fines, jail time, and criminal records
- Role play to help children develop strategies for turning down offers to use drugs
- Together, develop a 'no questions asked' agreement about picking children up at any time if they are in an unsafe situation or do not have a safe ride home
- Develop a written or verbal contract to agree on standards for healthy behaviour

- Outline up front what the consequences will be if the contract is violated

Observing and monitoring whom children spend time with is also an important prevention measure. When children hold a perception that drug use is 'normal', it increases the likelihood that they will use drugs, especially if they have friends who use drugs. Furthermore, just as marijuana use may be a precursor to using ecstasy, some research suggests that ecstasy use may be a forerunner of cocaine and heroin use for certain individuals.

What if a parent suspects their child is using ecstasy?

If parents or caregivers sense their child is using ecstasy, consider taking the following steps:

1. Think first, act second. Have a sound mind in preparation to discuss this with your child.
2. Help your child feel comfortable; allow them to choose the time and location to talk about substance use.
3. Be clear about what you want to say; this enables you to keep the conversation focused on your concern while also creating opportunity for your child to have a voice in resolving a problem.
4. Remain respectful, calm, and maintain an open manner.

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5. Work toward helping your child become independent and to make informed decisions.
6. Having these conversations with children can be overwhelming at times; therefore parents may wish to find guidance by turning to a professional for help. This may be a doctor, family, teacher, counselor, or other professional. Doing some research from reliable sources can also be helpful. For tips on how to talk to your teen, visit the Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information at www.health.org.

Can information found on websites be trusted?

Some websites used by youth claim to provide tips for the safe use of ecstasy. However, these are not reliable sources. Certain websites claim that as long as ecstasy is 'pure' or 'herbal', harsh side-effects will not occur. Some websites also offer testing kits to check the purity of the drug. However, these kits cannot provide information about other harmful ingredients that may be present. In reality, obtaining pure ecstasy is nearly impossible. Even drug dealers are often not aware of what is contained in the tablets they sell.



Useful websites for adults:

Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse

www.ccsa.ca

Centre for Addictions Research BC

www.carbc.ca/

Centre of Knowledge on Healthy Child Development
(translated brochures in Arabic, French, Hindi, Innu and Inuit, Italian Portuguese, Punjabi, and simplified and traditional Chinese).

<http://www.knowledge.offordcentre.com/>

National Anti-Drug Strategy

<http://www.nationalantidrugstrategy.gc.ca/prevention/youth-jeunes/index.html>

Examples of trustworthy websites for youth include:

Here to help BC

www.heretohelp.bc.ca/

Mindcheck

www.mindcheck.ca

Parenting Matters

According to the Centre for Knowledge on Healthy Child Development, "[p]rograms that require active participation by parents appear to be most successful in reducing substance abuse in older children and young teens. Also effective are programs that place emphasis on social skills and responsibility for one's own behaviour, or that provide information about substance abuse.

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Where can parents or youth go to learn more about drugs such as ecstasy?

- School counselors, teachers, parents, and other trusted adults can be good sources of information and help
- In Burnaby, parents and youth can contact:
 - **Odyssey I**
518 Howard Avenue
Burnaby, BC, V5B 3R1
Tel: 604.299.6377
 - **Burnaby Substance Use Services**
#320 – 7155 Kingsway
Burnaby, BC, V5E 2V1
Tel: 604.777.6872
 - **Brenda Laface**
District Substance Abuse Prevention Worker
Tel: 604.664.7215
- If youth require immediate assistance or are in danger, they can call 310-1234 (Children's Helpline) or dial 0 from any phone to ask the Operator for the Children's Helpline.

