

fast facts

ecstasy

■ **Overview:** Know why they call “ecstasy” ecstasy? Because it’s easier to sell a drug called “ecstasy” than one named *N-methyl 3, 4 methylenedioxy-amphetamine*. Whatever you call it, ecstasy (or MDMA) is just one in a class of psychedelic stimulants known as *phenethylamines*, and it’s been getting *way* more than its share of attention lately. Why? Mostly due to continuing high levels of use and new research that shows that ecstasy may come at a price higher than the 20-30 bucks a pop dealers charge for it at clubs and raves, probably more than most users suspect.



Hard-soft sell. Graphic from an herbal ecstasy ad.

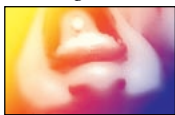
■ **Street Names:** E, X, XTC.

■ **Appearance:** Although pure MDMA is a white powder, “E” is usually sold in the form of tablets embossed with pop-culture icons.

■ **Actions/Effects:** Ecstasy’s main effects combine properties of both stimulants and hallucinogens. Increased feelings of well-being and sociability are common, as is a heightened sensitivity to sensory input, without hallucinations or other major perceptual distortions. Effects begin within 20-30 minutes, peak an hour or so later, and wind down in 4 to 6 hours.



■ **Risks/Side Effects:** While MDMA is relatively non-toxic, it causes several side effects, including increased heart rate and blood pressure and next-day “hangover” symptoms of fatigue and depression. A more serious risk tied to use is high body temperature, which has caused several deaths in recent years. In addition to its physical side effects, ecstasy has been linked by researchers to decreased performance on tests measuring memory, learning, and intelligence.



■ **Medical Uses:** While showing promise as a tool in psychotherapy (due to its reputed ability to increase empathy and insight), MDMA was classified a Schedule I controlled substance by the Drug Enforcement Administration in 1985, which halted all legal therapeutic use of the drug.

■ **Tolerance & Addiction:** MDMA is not physically addicting, although repeated use can produce tolerance and psychological dependence.

■ **Trends:** As ecstasy use surged in the late '90s and early 2000's, so did pharmacological frauds involving the drug. A common stand-in is a similar, but more-toxic drug, PMA (or paramethoxyamphetamine), which was linked to several deaths by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration.

■ **Demographics:** In recent years, ecstasy use has shown signs of levelling off among older teens and young adults. In 2006, 6.5 percent of high school seniors admitted that they've tried “E” at least once—down 44 percent from 2001, when 11.7 percent said they'd tried it.



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