

ECSTASY – WHAT PARENTS SHOULD KNOW

In a relatively short period of time, MDMA—commonly called Ecstasy—has secured a prominent place for itself in the world of substance abuse. Teen experimentation with Ecstasy has increased in the last three years. According to the Partnership’s annual study on drug abuse in America, more teens in America have now experimented with Ecstasy than cocaine, crack, or heroin; teen Ecstasy use is now on par with teen use of LSD and methamphetamine. Some 2.8 million teenagers in America have tried MDMA. Research indicates that this number may double unless immediate intervention is employed to reverse trends.

What Is It?

Chemically known as 3-4 methylenedioxymethamphetamine, Ecstasy is a psychoactive drug with amphetamine-like and hallucinogenic properties. It can be extremely dangerous, especially in high doses. The drug, which accelerates the release of serotonin in the brain, provides users with an intense high, characterized by extreme feelings of love and acceptance (*emotions teens crave*). Drug traffickers have demonstrated keen marketing skills and instincts for the teen market: Ecstasy tablets are manufactured with more than 150 different dye stamps, many of them familiar corporate logos, such as the Nike “swoosh” and the Mitsubishi star. Street names for Ecstasy include “X,” “E,” “XTC,” “Roll,” “Adam,” “Bean,” the “Hug Drug” or the “Love Drug.”



Ecstasy pills, like the ones above, are often stamped with symbols that appeal to kids.

How Dangerous Is The Use Of Ecstasy?

Ecstasy is called the “Hug Drug” or the “Love Drug” because users report it lowers their inhibitions and breaks down social barriers. Ecstasy can cause dramatic increases in body temperature and can lead to muscle breakdown, as well as kidney and cardiovascular system failure, which have been reported in some fatalities. Mixing Ecstasy with alcohol or other drugs increases the risk of adverse reaction. Research shows that Ecstasy, used in heavy doses, is neurotoxic. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, research findings link Ecstasy use to long-term damage to parts of the brain critical to thought and memory. Researchers believe MDMA causes damage to the neurons that use the chemical serotonin to communicate with other neurons.

How Widespread Is The Use Of Ecstasy?

In all, some 2.8 million American teens—roughly one of every 11 teens in the nation—have now tried Ecstasy. That means more teens now have experimented with Ecstasy than with cocaine, crack, or heroin. Ecstasy use is more common among older teens (16- to 17-year-olds) than younger teens; it is most common among young adults (18- to 25-years-old).

What Are The Warning Signs That Your Kid Could Be Using Ecstasy?

There are some general drug use symptoms to watch for, as well as physiological and behavioral effects specifically linked to the use of Ecstasy.

NEGATIVE EFFECTS

General warning signs your kid could be using drugs, including Ecstasy:

Change in his peer group; change in her sleeping pattern; declining grades and loss of interest in his hobbies or favorite activities; lack of motivation; hostile and uncooperative attitude; household money is disappearing.

Warning signs your kid could be using Ecstasy specifically:

Confusion; depression; headaches, and/or dizziness; muscle tension; panic attacks; severe anxiety and/or paranoia; sore jaw (involuntary jaw clenching is a notable short-term side effect of Ecstasy use); vomiting or nausea.

Warning signs your kid could be high on Ecstasy:

Complaints of blurred vision; rapid eye movement; chills or sweating; dehydration; confusion; faintness; severe anxiety and/or paranoia; trance-like state; transfixion on sights and sounds; clenching of the jaw and/or grinding of teeth.

Also, watch for the presence of paraphernalia associated with Ecstasy or the rave/club culture where use of the drug is prevalent. These items include pacifiers, lollipops, candy necklaces, glow sticks and/or glowing jewelry, a child-like backpack, mentholated vapor rub and surgical-type masks. Notice if your teen likes to attend all-night, “alcohol-free” dance parties. Bottled water is often sold at such events, and bottled water is often associated with raves. Ecstasy users are often counseled to drink lots of water to stay hydrated.

What should I do if:

I'm worried about my teenager and Ecstasy.

Stay involved in your teenager's life; be aware of anything in his life that might prompt him to use drugs. Let him know you love him, and talk with him about the risks and dangers of drugs, including Ecstasy. Give him the reason you don't want him using drugs, and listen to what he has to say. Work with your teen to establish firm but reasonable house rules—and consequences for violating them. Reinforce a “no drug use rule.”

I think my child may be using Ecstasy.

Voice your suspicions to your child when she's sober. Avoid making direct accusations. Stay calm and rational during your discussion. Also, watch for the warning signs noted above, but remember: some of these warning signs can be caused by emotional problems or physical illness. Discuss the possibilities with your teenager's doctor and, if necessary, take your child in for a physical exam to see if a medical condition exists.

Source: Partnership for a Drug-Free America

Reviewed 1/07