

What are hallucinogens?

Hallucinogens are a group of drugs that affect a person's perceptions of reality. They can cause psychedelic effects such as making you see, hear or feel things that don't exist. Naturally occurring hallucinogens include drugs such as magic mushrooms and Datura (Angel's Trumpets). Lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD) is a synthetic hallucinogen. Hallucinogens can be sold as paper squares, liquid, tablets and powder.

Effects

During use

The effects felt during use can be both desired and undesired. For most people who use hallucinogens, the desired effect is feelings of exhilaration and euphoria, enhanced awareness and insight, which is achieved through hallucinations. However, hallucinations can be frightening and traumatic. Hallucinogens affect individuals differently and a person may have different experiences on different occasions.

Harmful effects

- > mood swings, anxiety, paranoia (irrational distrust)
- > numbness, muscle weakness and twitching, tremor, impaired coordination, dilated pupils, seizures
- > increased heart rate and blood pressure, changes in body temperature, sweating, rapid deep breathing
- > nausea and vomiting.

Overdose - what to look out for

A person who is not experienced or has used an amount of the drug that exceeds his or her tolerance for the substance can experience an extreme case of intoxication causing:

- > tremors
- > nausea and vomiting
- > panic attacks
- > depressive or suicidal thoughts
- > profuse sweating
- > diarrhoea
- > high temperature
- > drowsiness
- > breathing to stop.

If someone is experiencing any of the above signs, **phone 000** immediately for medical attention. Police will not attend unless the ambulance officers call for help or a death occurs.

Effects of long-term use

A condition called hallucinogen persisting perception disorder (HPPD) can be developed in people who have taken hallucinogens on a number of occasions. This can cause flashbacks and long term problems such as the user feeling disconnected from their body and having visual problems such as seeing geometric shapes, coloured flashes, and objects at the edge of their vision. HPPD can persist for months or years and can be irreversible.

Hallucinogens and schizophrenia

People with schizophrenia and other mental illness should avoid using hallucinogens as it is likely to aggravate their symptoms.

Duration

The effects of hallucinogens begin within half an hour, peak at around three to five hours and last for up to 12 hours.

Dependence

Using hallucinogens daily or almost every day, over a period of time, can lead to physical and psychological changes in the body. The body adapts or 'gets used to' having hallucinogens on a regular basis. This is the basis of tolerance. People who are tolerant need more of the drug to achieve the same effects, but increasing the dose also increases the likelihood of undesirable and harmful effects.

Typically dependence on hallucinogens is not an issue for people who use hallucinogens because they are usually only used for short periods and this pattern of use is not usually associated with dependence.

Withdrawal

As with dependence, withdrawal is not usually an issue for people who use hallucinogens because they are usually only used for short periods of time. Psychological withdrawal symptoms are more common than physical symptoms and may include anxiety, depression and mood swings.

Hallucinogens and the law

It is illegal to make, keep, use, sell or give away hallucinogens.

Under the section 47 of the *Road Traffic Act 1961*, it is an offence to drive or attempt to drive a motor vehicle under the influence of a drug. Drugs in your system make driving extremely dangerous because they impair coordination, reduce reaction time, and affect your vision and ability to judge distance and speed.

For more information about hallucinogens and the law, visit www.sahealth.sa.gov.au > Health topics > Legal matters > Illicit drug laws.

Further information

Risks of using drugs - visit www.sahealth.sa.gov.au > Healthy Living > Is your health at risk? > The risks of using drugs.

Phone the Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS) on 1300 13 1340 between 8.30am and 10pm for confidential telephone counselling, information and referral.

For more information

Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS)
Phone: 1300 13 1340
Confidential telephone counselling and information available between 8.30am and 10pm every day.
www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/dassa

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March 2017. DASSA:00503. Consumer reviewed.

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