Ecstasy effects [1]

Dear Alice,

I heard that the first reaction you have to taking ecstasy is to become violently ill, after which the party can continue. This sounds like an urban legend to me. Could you clarify please?

Answer

Dear Reader,

Ecstasy (N-methyl-3,4-methylenedioxyamphetamine or MDMA) is a recreationally used hallucinogenic amphetamine. There is limited research about the nature of effects and no mention of "violent illness" in the scientific literature. Some users do report that they experience nausea, chills/sweating, blurred vision, and an increase in blood pressure. As is the case with any substance, dosage, pre-existing health conditions, and drug combinations (including alcohol and prescription drugs) can all adversely impact one's experiences. FYI, the effects of one dose of "X" (usually taken in pill form) lasts for four to six hours.

Ecstasy is sometimes used as a companion at parties and nightclubs because it produces a combination of heightened arousal, mellowing effects, and enhanced self- and group-consciousness. The drug ? which is illegal and considered to have no legitimate use by the government since 1985, when some users' problems with X made headlines ? has been most associated with a rise in body temperature; usually resulting in acute dehydration. Adding to the risk of acute dehydration is that dancing for hours without enough breaks and water is pretty common while on X.

Studies have shown that ecstasy uses serotonin, a chemical in the brain that affects mood and after the initial high, users may feel tired, depressed, or moody. The body will eventually produce more serotonin, but it may take some time to get it back to normal levels. So, after a weekend of heavy partying, one could have trouble getting up and going to class or work, and, once there, may be irritable.

Heavy use has been linked to speed-like symptoms of paranoia, and in some cases, liver damage and heart attacks. Although research has not yielded conclusive evidence of ecstasy-induced brain damage in humans, heavy administration of the drug has produced neurological damage in rats and monkeys.

Urban legends aside, your question suggests you or someone you know might be considering giving ecstasy a try. Despite knowing the potential positive and negative effects of any
substance, have you given some thought to why people chose to use drugs like ecstasy? Knowing that violent illness hasn't been documented, but other negative consequences have, how would that impact the decision to use or not use? All drugs have effects on the body and in the case of ecstasy the lack of scientific research makes it difficult to know exactly how a person will react.

Alice!
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