

THE BASICS

LSD

Do you know?

- LSD (lysergic acid diethylamide) is commonly known as acid and has other nicknames, such as hits, boomers and dots.
- LSD is the most powerful of the hallucinogenic drugs (drugs that change the way you think, see and hear things).
- LSD is a man-made drug produced in illegal laboratories. It was derived from a substance found in a certain type of fungus that grows on grains.
- In its pure form, it is an odorless liquid or crystal powder. When prepared for selling in the street, it is often mixed with colored substances and sold in capsules, tablets or liquid form. The liquid form is usually dropped on a small piece of blotting paper that may look like a stamp or tiny picture.
- A dose is tiny (0.2 to 0.5 mg). If a tablet the size of an aspirin was made of pure LSD, it would be enough for 3,000 doses.
- LSD is usually taken by mouth. It is not injected or smoked.
- Effects are felt within an hour and can last from two to 12 hours.
- The LSD experience is unpredictable and can range from pleasurable to frightening.

Flashbacks

Some people may have “flashbacks” after using LSD. A flashback is experiencing the drug effects again without having taken the drug. These are reported to happen days, weeks and sometimes years after taking LSD. At this point, researchers do not know why flashbacks occur.

Short-term Effects

While using a person may experience:

- dilated (big) pupils, glassy eyes
- loss of appetite, dry mouth
- dizziness, numbness, muscle weakness and trembling
- nausea, chills and sweating
- increased heart rate, blood pressure, body temperature and rapid breathing
- changes in the way the senses work, such as “seeing” music or “hearing” colours
- feelings of power
- “pseudo-hallucinations” (the person sees, feels, hears things that are not really there, but knows they are not really there)
- true hallucinations (seeing, hearing, feeling things that are not really there). These may be pleasant, but can be frightening, and the experience is referred to as a “bad trip.” (The user may see upsetting images that seem real, causing great anxiety and fear.)
- rapid mood swings (feeling extremely happy one minute and sad the next)
- time going fast or slow, distances seeming further away or closer than they really are, weight feeling lighter or heavier than it really is
- suddenly being able to remember long-forgotten past events. These memories may seem to merge with what is happening when using LSD
- magical feelings

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Long-term Effects

- decreased motivation, lack of interest in life or the future, easily frustrated
- panic
- irrational behaviour (behaviour that doesn't make sense or is out of character)
- a permanent feeling of not knowing what is real and what is not real (not being able to "come down" from the high)

Tolerance and Dependence

- Users may become psychologically dependent on LSD (they feel they need it).
- LSD does not seem to cause physical dependence (the body does not develop a need for the drug).
- Tolerance (a need for more of the drug to get the desired effect) develops rapidly. After not using the drug for a few days, tolerance wears off and the user will feel the effects again when using.

Withdrawal Symptoms

- Users may crave the drug.
- Users can experience a "crash" period where they feel sad or down.

Other Risks

- LSD may cause birth defects in a fetus when taken by a pregnant woman.
- LSD, like other street drugs, may contain other harmful substances.
- In rare cases, a psychotic episode may be triggered (a condition in which the person does not know what is real and what is not real). Also, mental health problems may worsen for people who already have them.
- People can put themselves in risky situations when on this drug (driving while impaired, having unprotected sex, taking unsafe actions which could cause injury).

If you experience any of these negative effects, seek medical attention immediately.

Mental Health

- Substance use and mental health problems often can occur together.
- Substance use may increase the risk of mental health problems.
- People with mental health problems are at higher risk of developing substance abuse problems.
 - Sometimes they use alcohol and other drugs to give themselves a break from mental health symptoms.
 - For most people, though, alcohol and other substance use only covers up the symptoms and may make them worse.

REMEMBER: A person's experience with any drug can vary. Here are a few of the many things that may affect the experience: the amount and strength of the drug taken, the setting, a person's mood and expectations before taking the drug, gender, overall health, past experience with that drug and whether more than one drug is being used at the same time. Using alcohol and other drugs at the same time can be dangerous.

Sources and For More Information

ABCs of LSD (information sheet), Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission, 2002.

A Primer of Drug Action, Robert Julien, Henry Holt and Company, 2001.

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Facts About LSD (information sheet), Addiction Research Foundation, Toronto, 1997.

Fast Facts on Alcohol, AFM, 2002.

Hallucinogens (brochure), Addiction Research Foundation, Toronto, 1997.

National Institute on Drug Abuse Website: www.nida.nih.gov

Straight Facts about Drugs and Drug Abuse, Health Canada, 2000.

Street Drugs: A Drug Identification Guide, Publishers Group, LLC, Plymouth, MN, 2005.

For more information or for help with a drug or alcohol problem: Contact your local Addictions Foundation of Manitoba (AFM) office or visit the website at www.afm.mb.ca. AFM offers a broad range of prevention and rehabilitation services, including harm reduction and abstinence-based programs for alcohol, other drugs and gambling.

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