

THE BASICS

PCP

Do you know?

- PCP (phencyclidine) is commonly known as angel dust. It is also called boat, love boat, rocket fuel and wack.
 - PCP is an hallucinogen (a drug that changes the way you think, see and hear things). It also works as a stimulant (a drug that increases energy and alertness) and as an anaesthetic (a drug that causes loss of physical feeling and/or consciousness so pain can't be felt).
 - Veterinarians have used PCP as an anaesthetic for animals. Thus, PCP is sometimes called "horse tranquilizer."
 - PCP comes in white or coloured chunks or crystals, as a powder, a liquid or in tablets. It is a man-made drug that is produced in illegal laboratories.
 - It is often smoked by dipping a cigarette or marijuana joint into liquid PCP. It can also be swallowed or injected.
 - A typical dose is about 5 mg, with effects being felt 15 minutes after smoking it. Effects can last four to six hours.
- a changed sense of space (feeling out of place or apart from the surroundings) and time (time seems to go fast or slow)
 - problems concentrating and talking to people
 - mental confusion and physical clumsiness
 - terror, paranoia (feeling scared or suspicious for no reason) and increased aggressive behaviour, especially with a high dose
 - coma, seizures, psychosis (not knowing what is real and what is not real) and possible death, especially with a high dose

A Note About the Effects of PCP

The effects of using PCP vary widely among users. Individual users may experience different effects each time the drug is taken.

Short-term Effects

While using, and with increasing doses, a person may experience:

- euphoria (extremely pleasurable feelings)
- sweating, flushed skin
- blurred vision and a blank stare
- unclear speech
- lowered heart rate, blood pressure and body temperature

Long-term Effects

While not many people use PCP regularly for long periods of time, it is known that with long term, regular use, a person may experience:

- speech problems
- depression (feeling sad) and anxiety
- memory loss, problems thinking clearly
- flashbacks (feeling the effects of the drug days or weeks later)
- a schizophrenia-like condition (the person withdraws from reality) or paranoia (feeling scared or suspicious for no reason)
- aggressive or violent feelings
- auditory hallucinations (hearing things that are not there)

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Tolerance and Dependence

- Users of PCP become psychologically dependent (they feel they need it) as well as physically dependent (the body needs it).
- Tolerance can develop with regular use, with more frequent and larger doses needed to get the same effect.

Withdrawal Symptoms

- PCP users may have strong cravings for more of the drug.
- The user may be confused for a few hours to a few days after using (or even a few weeks if the dose was large). This can cause unpredictable behaviour, such as rage, violence, severe anxiety and panic.
- A medical professional should supervise a person who is recovering from the effects of using PCP.

Other Risks

- With an overdose of PCP, convulsions (violent muscle spasms), coma and possibly death can occur.
- People can put themselves in risky situations when taking PCP (driving while impaired, having unprotected sex, taking unsafe actions which could cause injury).
 - Taking unsafe actions is a special concern for users of PCP because of the possible combination of effects (hallucinations, increased energy, and the blocking of the feeling of physical pain).

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

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

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

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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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