

Hallucinogens

Slang-terms

Acid, trips, blotters, tabs microdots, dots, Angel dust, peace pill, shrooms, mushies, magics, golden tops, blue meanies, liberty caps, Special K, K, ket, kitkat and super K, are common terms used in Australia.

LSD (lysergic acid diethylamide) paper doses are also referred to by their design name e.g. Batman, Smiley, Bart Simson. Nationally, the main type of hallucinogen used in the last six months was LSD, followed by magic mushrooms.

What is a Hallucinogen?

Hallucinogens were first developed in the 1940's in Switzerland and explored as a treatment for some mental illnesses. Also known as 'psychedelic drugs', they change the way a person perceives the world. They work directly on the brain and affect all the senses, producing illusions or hallucinations - that is seeing, and hearing, tasting, smelling and feeling things that do not exist.

Some hallucinogens occur naturally in fungi, leaves, trees, seeds and vines. Others are manufactured in laboratories.

Some examples of hallucinogens include:

- LSD (lysergic acid diethylamide)
- Magic mushrooms (psilocybin)
- Morning glory seeds
- Datura
- Mescaline (peyote cactus)
- PCP (phencyclidine)
- Ketamine
- Ecstasy (MDMA and related drugs, in high doses)
- Cannabis (in high quantities).

Use of Hallucinogens

Hallucinogens have been used for thousands of years in a variety of cultures for their spiritual and mystical associations. In the 1960s they became fashionable in Europe and America, as many young people were questioning old ideas and values, and pursuing personal freedom.

In the 2008 Australian Drugs Trends from the Illicit Drug Reporting system (IDRS) Series 19 indicated that a large proportions of participants reported having used hallucinogens at some stage in their lifetimes (69%), recent use (i.e. in the preceding six months) remained fairly low, with less than one-tenth (6%) reporting use in the six months preceding interview. Frequency of use was also low, with those who had used reporting doing so on a median frequency of two days during the last six months. Eleven percent of the sample reported injecting hallucinogens at some point in their lifetime, while less than 1% had injected them in the last six months.

Description and Route of Use

In its pure state, LSD is a white, odourless powder, but it can come in the form of liquid, capsules, and tablets, squares of gelatine or blotting paper.

The most popular form today is absorbent sheets of paper. This is divided into squares and impregnated with LSD. The sheets are then printed with a small motif, hence many of the slang terms used. The designs may consist of patterns, symbols, cartoon characters or pictures depicting current events. This form of LSD is taken orally.

PCP is usually swallowed, sniffed or injected. It is sometimes also sprinkled onto tobacco or cannabis and smoked. Magic mushrooms are usually eaten fresh, cooked or brewed into a "tea". Occasionally, they may be mixed with tobacco or cannabis and smoked. Ketamine is usually swallowed, snorted or injected. It is also sometimes smoked with other substances such as cannabis or tobacco. Mescaline is usually swallowed. Peyote buttons are sometimes chewed, or ground and smoked.

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Immediate effects

The effects of LSD usually begin within half an hour of taking the drug, are at most intense in three to five hours, and last for up to 12 hours.

Some of the typical effects of hallucinogens include:

- blurred vision
- increased breathing rate
- euphoria
- sense of relaxation and feeling of wellbeing
- hallucinations and distorted sensory processing, including visual, auditory, body, time and space perception
- disorganised thoughts, confusion and difficulty concentrating, thinking or maintaining attention
- anxiety, agitation, paranoia and feelings of panic
- dizziness
- impaired coordination
- increased heart rate and blood pressure
- nausea and vomiting
- increased body temperature and sweating; may alternate with chills and shivering
- numbness.

Bad trips

While using LSD or 'tripping', the person may experience strong feelings of fear or anxiety. The hallucinatory effects range from being unpleasant to so intense, that the person feels like they are 'going crazy'. Panic can lead to risky behaviour and paranoia can develop. The reasons for "bad trips" are not known. Usually, the negative feelings disappear when the drug wears off. However, there have been reports of people experiencing hallucinations, bizarre behaviour and paranoia for several days after taking the drug. Occasionally, these effects can last weeks or even months.

Long-term effects

The most disturbing long-term effect of LSD is the potential for 'flashback' experiences. A 'flashback' is a spontaneous and unpredictable recurrence of the drug experience. They can occur days, weeks and even years after the drug was last taken. They are usually visual and last for a minute or two. The use of other drugs, stress, fatigue or physical exercise can spark off flashbacks. Regular users are more likely to experience flashbacks. Long-term, frequent use of some hallucinogens may impair aspects of memory and selected cognitive functions. It may also be linked to personality and mood changes.

Some people may experience a "drug-induced" psychosis after using hallucinogens. This can occur after a single dose or after chronic use, and is characterised by hallucinations, delusions and bizarre behaviour. These episodes may last several hours, or longer for some people.

Tolerance and dependency

Tolerance to LSD and other hallucinogens develops rapidly but goes away quickly once regular use is stopped. Cross-tolerance can also develop - using one type of hallucinogen makes you tolerant to other hallucinogens.

References

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