

Hallucinogens

Hallucinogens, a group of drugs that cause mind altering effects, have been commonly used for religious rituals around the world for centuries, although several hallucinogens are illegal in the United States. In recent months, “magic mushrooms” or psilocybin, a popular hallucinogen, has gained attention as activists in Denver are hoping to decriminalize the use of the drug and Oregon is hoping to vote on the legal use of psilocybin for medical use in 2020 (Denver Post). Overall, teen use of hallucinogens in the United States has been low in recent years compared to other drugs like marijuana and alcohol. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), 6.6% of 12th graders reported using a hallucinogen in their lifetime, compared to 43.6% that reported using marijuana in their lifetime. The increase in public attention hallucinogens are receiving is concerning.

Hallucinogens are drugs that are made from plants, plant extracts or are human-made. Hallucinogens are commonly divided into two different types, classic hallucinogens and dissociative drugs. Both types effect the user’s ability to think, communicate and interpret reality in a rational way. Classic hallucinogens cause extreme emotional swings, distort perception of time and, at times, can make the user feel frightened by their environment. Dissociative drugs can cause the user to feel “out of control and disconnected from their body and environment” and can cause respiratory depression and heart rate abnormalities (NIDA). Other physiological effects may include increased blood pressure, elevated heart rate and dilated pupils. Deaths directly related to classic hallucinogen use are rare, instead deaths occur due to accidents, dangerous behavior or suicide caused by the drugs’ effects. An overdose of PCP or ketamine, two dissociative drugs, can cause seizures, coma and respiratory arrest (DEA).



There are a several hallucinogens, but the most common classic hallucinogens are:

LSD, also known as acid, tabs, blotter or sugar cubes, is a clear or white odorless water-soluble compound produced in labs. LSD can be made into tablets or diluted in alcohol or water and sold in liquid. LSD is most commonly soaked on paper and sold as “blotters”. Hallucinations, mood changes and changes to the user’s perception of time, space and other factors of the environment will begin within an hour. Flashbacks from the experience can last for days or weeks.

Psilocybin, also known as magic mushrooms or shrooms, is derived from mushrooms found in the tropical regions of South America, Mexico and the US. Psilocybin is commonly dried or eaten fresh by itself or with food or tea. The effects on the body are similar to LSD, but can also cause panic attacks or psychosis at high doses. It may also cause vomiting or muscle weakness.

The most common dissociative drugs are:

PCP, also known as angel dust, ozone, rocket fuel, hog or superweed, was developed as a general anesthetic in the 1950s. PCP is sold as a tablet, powder or liquid and can be snorted, smoked, ingested or injected. Some users sprinkle PCP on marijuana or tobacco before smoking. High doses can cause violent behavior, suicidal thoughts and behaviors, seizures or coma.

Ketamine, also known as K or special K, is used as an anesthetic for humans and animals. The drug is manufactured as an injectable liquid, but is commonly found in powder or tablet form on the streets. Ketamine is often combined with MDMA, marijuana, amphetamine or cocaine. It has been used in sexual assaults by slipping the drug into the victim's drink. It can cause hallucinations, but is not as long lasting as other hallucinogens. Users often feel relaxed and disconnected from body and pain.

Another popular drug that is considered both a hallucinogen and a stimulant is MDMA, also known as ecstasy or molly. Like other hallucinogens, MDMA is available as a tablet, powder or liquid (pictured above). MDMA is a synthetic drug that distorts the senses and increases energy levels and feelings of pleasure. MDMA is commonly used by youth at parties. The drug is often mixed with alcohol, marijuana or other substances. The effects usually last 30 minutes to 6 hours, but can last for weeks. Studies have linked MDMA to long-term memory and learning problems. Common psychological effects include anxiety, paranoia, sleep problems and confusion.

Most hallucinogens are Schedule I under the Controlled Substances Act, except for Ketamine and PCP, which are Schedule II and III respectively because of the accepted medical use of the two drugs. Evidence shows that hallucinogens can be addictive and can cause withdrawal symptoms. Hallucinogens can cause serious short-term and long-term effects that can result in harm at any age. To learn more about hallucinogens, use the links below:

<https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/hallucinogens>

<https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/research-reports/hallucinogens-dissociative-drugs/why-do-people-take-hallucinogens>

https://www.dea.gov/sites/default/files/sites/getsmartaboutdrugs.com/files/publications/DoA_2017Ed_Updated_6.16.17.pdf#page=72

<https://www.denverpost.com/2019/02/19/psychedelic-mushrooms-denver/>