

A Weekly FAX from the Center for Substance Abuse Research

University of Maryland, College Park

***No Longer Just a Club Drug,
Ecstasy (MDMA) Has Become More Mainstream Among Youth***

Ecstasy is becoming popular among youth. In the past year, CESAR interviews with arrested juvenile arrestees have found ecstasy to be more mainstream and to be sold outside rave scenes. In addition, the Monitoring the Future study reports lifetime use of ecstasy (MDMA) has more than doubled between 1989 (3.3%) and 1998 (7.2%) among students between the ages of 19 and 28. Recreational use of ecstasy has been popular at "rave" night club environments for a number of years. Rave attendees are usually upper/middle class white youths in their mid-teens to early twenties. Youths are now stating that ecstasy is no longer a club drug. For approximately \$25 a pill, users claim the effects of ecstasy can last from 4 to 8 hours. Users report being drawn to the abundance of energy and heightened sensitivity to touch ecstasy induces.

What is Ecstasy? Ecstasy or MDMA (3, 4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine) is a synthetic drug that combines properties of mescaline (hallucinogen) with methamphetamine (a type of speed). Ecstasy is often cut with a variety of other drugs such as amphetamine, LSD, ketamine, cocaine, and heroin. However, since MDMA powder is most often compressed into tablet form, it has the appearance of a legitimate and safe pill.

What other names does it go by? E, X, XTC, rolls, Adam pills, Lover's speed, Stacy, and Beans.

What are the health effects of Ecstasy? MDMA users report a sense of euphoria, hyperexcitability, rapid heartbeat, dehydration, teeth grinding/jaw clenching, loss of appetite, nausea, and insomnia. In high doses, users have been known to experience panic attacks, seizures, and loss of consciousness. A review of several studies by the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) concludes "compared to nonusers, heavy MDMA users had significant impairments in visual and verbal memory" (p. 11). Findings from Johns Hopkin University and the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) suggests "MDMA use may lead to impairments in other cognitive functions besides memory, such as the ability to reason verbally or sustain attention" (p. 11). In one study using monkeys, brain damage was still present even after 7 years of discontinued use of MDMA.

SOURCE: Mathias, R. (1999). "Ecstasy" damages the brain and impairs memory in humans. *NIDA Notes*, (14) 5, pp. 10-11
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**CESAR RESEARCH RECENTLY PUBLISHED IN
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