

# What You Need to Know About Youth & MDMA (Ecstasy/Molly)

## WHAT IS MDMA?

3,4-Methylenedioxy-methamphetamine (MDMA) is a synthetic drug<sup>1</sup> (meaning it was made in a lab) that acts as both a stimulant and hallucinogen, producing feelings of increased energy, pleasure, distorted perceptions of time and heightened senses.<sup>2</sup> MDMA is the official scientific name for the drug, but it is most commonly referred to as “molly” or “ecstasy.”<sup>1-2</sup> To learn the common slang terms and code words for MDMA, check out the [Drug Enforcement Administration’s full list](#).

## HOW IS MDMA USED?

MDMA typically comes as colorful pills or tablets that can be swallowed or crushed into a powder and snorted.<sup>2</sup> The pills or tablets often have graphics or logos on them, creating brands for individuals to seek out while also appealing to young people.<sup>2</sup> MDMA can also be swallowed as a capsule or liquid,<sup>1</sup> smoked as a powder or injected as a liquid, though this is a rare mode of use in the United States.<sup>2</sup> “Stacking” (when an individual takes three or more tablets at once) or “piggy-backing” (where a series of tablets is taken over a short period of time) are usually how MDMA is used.

MDMA is referred to as a “party drug” as it is often used in clubs or party settings by youth and young adults for its energizing and euphoric properties.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, MDMA is often used in group settings and also consumed with other substances such as alcohol and/or marijuana.<sup>2</sup> “Candy flipping” is a common trend among young adults where MDMA is taken in combination with LSD (lysergic acid diethylamide, also known by the street name “acid”),<sup>2</sup> a synthetic psychedelic.<sup>3</sup>

## WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF MDMA?

MDMA increases the activity of three chemicals in the brain: dopamine, norepinephrine and serotonin. Once affected by the drug, each of these chemicals produces a different response, including increased energy, alertness, heart rate and blood pressure; elevated mood and empathy; sensitivity to touch and sexual arousal;<sup>2</sup> sleeplessness; and/or loss of appetite.<sup>1</sup> Individuals may also experience nausea, muscle cramping or involuntary teeth clenching, blurred vision, chills, sweating, anxiety, depression and/or paranoia as a result of using MDMA.<sup>1</sup> The effects of MDMA occur within 30 to 45 minutes of use<sup>2</sup> and typically last about 3 to 6 hours, though many individuals will take a second dose before the effects of the first dose diminish.<sup>1</sup> In some cases, depending on the individual’s tolerance and the dose of MDMA taken, the effects of the drug can last days or even weeks after ingestion.<sup>2</sup>

## ARE THERE OTHER RISKS FROM USING MDMA?

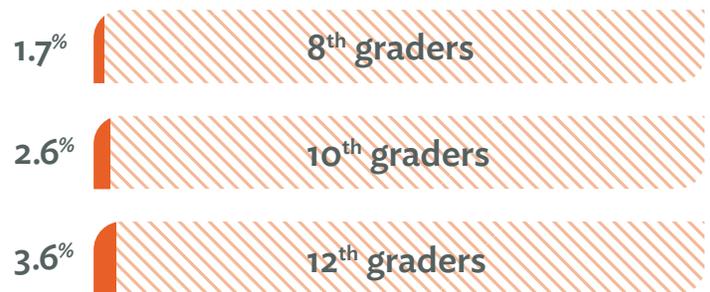
Yes. MDMA affects the body's ability to regulate temperature<sup>1</sup> and, combined with the conditions in which it is often taken — clubs or parties — severe dehydration is common.<sup>2</sup> This can result in liver, kidney or heart failure, and even death.<sup>1</sup> When used frequently and over a prolonged period, the serotonin system within the brain can be damaged, reducing an individual's ability to feel pleasure.<sup>2</sup>

MDMA is also the most commonly “cut” or “laced,” meaning it is mixed with other substances (such as cocaine, ketamine, methamphetamine or fentanyl) to increase the euphoric effects, often without the knowledge of the person taking it.<sup>1-2</sup> This increases the risk for harmful health effects, including overdose and death.<sup>1</sup>

## IS MDMA ADDICTIVE?

Research results vary on whether MDMA is addictive, though some individuals report feelings of withdrawal, such as fatigue, loss of appetite, depression and trouble concentrating, when reducing or stopping use.<sup>1</sup>

## HOW COMMON IS MDMA USE AMONG YOUTH?



In 2020, 1.7% of 8th graders, 2.6% of 10th graders and 3.6% of 12th graders reported using MDMA in their lifetime.<sup>4</sup> The rates of lifetime, past year and past month use have remained steady for 8th graders with noticeable fluctuations for 10th and 12th graders.<sup>4</sup>

## IS MDMA LEGAL?

No. MDMA is classified as a Schedule I drug under the Controlled Substances Act.<sup>2</sup> This means that it is not legal anywhere or for any purpose in the United States.<sup>2</sup>

## REFERENCES

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