

Club drugs

Introduction

Nightclubs, dance parties, raves and other events have become popular as venues for people to share their interest in particular types of music or dancing, to have fun and meet new people, or just to hang out with friends. For some people, this also means taking 'club drugs'—a range of substances used to increase their enjoyment of the event.

This fact sheet provides an introduction to club drugs and the risks involved in taking them, and offers some tips for safer partying.

What are club drugs?

'Club drugs' refers to a range of substances used in the environment of a nightclub or other entertainment venue or event. This includes drugs such as ecstasy, speed, LSD, GHB and ketamine.

Amphetamines

Amphetamines are a group of related drugs that include:

- speed (amphetamine, dexamphetamine)
- meth (methamphetamine, methylamphetamine)
- ice (crystalline methamphetamine hydrochloride, purified methylamphetamine).

Amphetamines are sold in different forms, including powder, liquid, capsules, tablets and paste.

Ecstasy

Ecstasy (MDMA) is an amphetamine-type substance classed as an hallucinogenic amphetamine, which means it combines the effects of hallucinogens such as LSD and the stimulant effects of speed.

LSD

LSD (lysergic acid diethylamide) is an hallucinogen, also known as a 'psychedelic drug', or 'acid'. In its pure state, LSD is a white, odourless powder, but usually comes in the form of a liquid, tablet, capsule or square of gelatine or blotting paper.

Ketamine

Ketamine, also known as 'Special K', is a powerful anaesthetic used in surgery. It is a disassociative drug, which means that when used the mind seems to 'leave' the body. Ketamine comes as a liquid (for injecting), pill, powder and a formulation for smoking.

GHB

GHB (gamma-hydroxybutyrate) is also known as 'fantasy', 'grievous bodily harm (GBH)' and 'liquid ecstasy'. It comes as a colourless, odourless liquid or as a crystal powder.

Alcohol

Many people do not think about alcohol in the same way as they would other club drugs, but statistics show that alcohol is the most popular recreational drug used in Australia. It is also the most common drug used to assist sexual assault (drink spiking).

What are the risks?

All drugs have the potential to cause harm, ranging from immediate physical harms to confusion, psychosis, dependence and, in extreme cases, death. The risks of harm are increased when greater amounts of drugs are taken, or when drugs are mixed, especially with alcohol. Mixing drugs influences the effects, and increases the chances of problems occurring.

Why do people use club drugs?

Club drug users take these substances to 'enhance' the party environment by changing their sensory experiences. For example, the lights might seem brighter or more colourful, it might make the music sound different or the beat more powerful.

Some people use club drugs to be able to dance for longer periods, have more energy and stay awake for longer.

What are the effects?

Due to the number and variety of drugs used as club drugs, it is not possible to list here the specific effects of each particular substance.

It is important to remember that the effects of any drug, including club drugs, vary from person to person. A number of factors can have an influence on how the person is affected, including age and physical characteristics (such as weight and general health), type and quantity of the substance used.

In addition, the effects of some drugs, such as LSD, are particularly unpredictable.

Short-term effects

Some of the pleasurable short-term effects of club drugs such as ecstasy include feelings of well-being and euphoria, confidence, lack of inhibition, alertness, increased closeness with others and sexual arousal.

Unpleasant and/or risky short-term effects include nausea, vomiting, sweating, jaw clenching, teeth grinding, anxiety, loss of appetite, hallucinations, confusion, seizure, coma and, in extreme cases, death.

When using certain types of drug, negative feelings and effects can dominate and lead to what is known as a 'bad trip'. The person may experience strong feelings of fear, anxiety, panic or paranoia, or hallucinations such as spiders crawling on the skin. 'Bad trips' are particularly common among first-time users.

Long-term effects

Many of the popular club drugs, such as GHB and ice, are relatively new in Australia, and little is known about their long-term effects.

Damage to brain cells by neurotoxins means that long-term effects of using ecstasy, speed and cocaine might include depression, changes to mood, memory, aggression, appetite, sexual function and sleep patterns. Long-term use of drugs such as cocaine and ice can lead to adverse physical effects like heart attacks, stroke, respiratory failure, high blood pressure and increase in heart rate.

Reducing the risks

As a parent or worker, you can help reduce the risks by providing young people with appropriate information on safe partying. The following may be useful.

The best way to avoid problems with drugs is not to use them. However, if people do choose to use them, it is important that they do so in the safest way possible. This includes not mixing drugs or sharing needles.

Safer partying

Nightclubs, raves and other entertainment venues and events can get very crowded and hot, even in winter. Some drugs, such as ecstasy and speed, raise the body's temperature, while alcohol dehydrates the body. The risks of overheating and feeling unwell can be reduced by following some Do's and Don'ts:

Do

- Take regular rests from dancing—use a 'chill-out' space to rest or recover.
- Wear light, absorbent clothing.
- Replace lost fluids with water—500ml per hour if active and 250ml per hour if inactive
- Watch your drink (drink spiking).
- Allow your body to recover—make sure you eat well and get enough sleep.

Don't

- Mix drugs.
- Mix GHB and alcohol—this mix has been associated with overdose.

When something goes wrong

- If you (or a friend) feel too hot or unwell, ask for assistance.
- For medical assistance, call an ambulance (tel. Emergency 000).