MDMA and Emerging Drugs 2

Parent Summary

Effects of MDMA: Lesson 2

The effects of MDMA can vary greatly from person to person. MDMA can also affect the same person differently each time they use it. How MDMA affects an individual depends on the following three factors

1. **The drug:** strength, amount used, frequency of use and how the drug is taken.
2. **The person:** their mood, expectations of the drug, their usual personality, their mental health, and certain medication.
3. **The setting:** where the person is and who they are with.

The time taken for MDMA to start to take effect also varies, but the effects can often start to be felt within 20 to 60 minutes after ingestion.

Short-term effects of MDMA may include:

Cognitive Effects (thoughts, decision-making, attention)

Psychological Effects (mood/mental health)

- **Increased alertness**
- **Lack of inhibition**
- **Confusion**
- **Poor concentration**
- **Euphoria (a high)**
- **Sense of wellbeing**
- **Feelings of increased closeness to others**
- **Increased self-confidence**
- **Depression**
- **Anxiety**
- **Paranoia**
- **Panic attacks**
- **Irritability**
- **Agitation***
- **Hallucinations***

Physical Effects

- **Dehydration and overheating**
- **Heatstroke**
- **Trouble urinating**
- **Loss of appetite**
- **Problems having sex / reaching an orgasm**
- **Hot and cold flushes**
- **Blurred vision**
- **Muscle aches**
- **Nausea / vomiting**
- **Violence***
- **Dizziness***
- **Flushing / fever***
- **Loss of co-ordination***
- **Increased energy**
- **Tongue and cheek chewing**
- **Teeth grinding and jaw clenching**
- **Dry mouth and thirst**
- **Dilated (enlarged) pupils**
- **Increased body temperature**
- **Increased heart rate**
- **Sweating**
- **Inability to sleep**
- **Headaches***
- **Tremors***
- **Death***

*These side effects are less common but they still do occur, particularly when high doses of MDMA are consumed, or when the pill/capsule/powder contains a mix of multiple chemicals that interact.

Deaths from MDMA are rare, but when they do happen, they often attract a lot of media attention. Few deaths are due to poisoning from MDMA itself. Most MDMA- related deaths are a result of using the drug in hot and crowded environments where individuals have become severely dehydrated overheated.

A very small number of deaths have resulted from people drinking too much water after taking MDMA. If too much water is consumed this can dilute the levels of salt and other minerals in the blood. This can result in the brain swelling, which can lead to coma or death.

Effects of emerging drugs

Even though emerging drugs are marketed as having similar effects to other illegal drugs, they have not been around for long enough for experts to know how these substances will actually affect people, especially in the long term.

The effects of emerging drugs also depend on what substances are included in the pill, capsule or powder.

Since these drugs can contain a range of ingredients, taking an emerging drug is like a roll of the dice - the effects are unpredictable!

Like MDMA, the effects of emerging drugs will vary from person to person. Some **short-term effects** reported by users of mephedrone, a type of **synthetic cathinone**, include:

- **Overheating**
- **Heart palpitations**
- **Insomnia**
- **Nausea**
- **Agitation**
- **Hallucinations**

Reported effects of **synthetic cannabinoids** include:

- **Vomiting**
- **Confusion**
- **Memory changes**
- **Seizures**
- **Extreme anxiety**
- **Psychosis**

*There is some evidence to suggest that synthetic cannabis is stronger and more dangerous than traditional cannabis

Several deaths have been linked to emerging drugs, often due to people mixing them with alcohol or other drugs, or because they have taken too big of a dose

Dosage

Emerging drugs can be very strong at low doses and can have serious and intense effects. Just because emerging drugs are marketed as having similar effects to traditional illegal drugs, it does not mean the dosages are the same. Also, the packaging labels are not always accurate or

may not include dosage information at all. These factors can lead to overdosing and have serious health consequences.

'Coming down'

'Coming down' occurs when a psychostimulant drug starts to wear off. Symptoms of a 'come down' include:

- **Feeling irritable**
- **Feeling depressed –** this can last from a few hours to a few days
- **Feeling lethargic and paranoid**
- **Nausea and a lack of appetite**
- **Being unable to sleep –** usually because of feeling agitated and aroused

Some people try to self-medicate using drugs such as cannabis to avoid these symptoms. Using other drugs to avoid the come down can have further negative effects and should be avoided. The best strategy is for a person to simply rest and give their body and mind time to recover.

Social impacts of using MDMA and emerging drugs

Relationships: The short-term effects of MDMA and emerging drug use can lead to increased arguments, jealousy, break-ups and even being kicked out of home.

Work and study problems: A study found that people who used MDMA were more likely to:

- **Use sick leave**
- **Skip class**
- **Have trouble concentrating**
- **Lack motivation**
- **Show reduced work performance**
- **Quit work or be fired**

This is because MDMA interferes with mental processing which can take days to recover from.

Financial problems: Some MDMA users report financial problems because they use heavily and spend a lot of money buying MDMA. They then might not be able to afford other social activities, purchase items they want, pay the rent or buy food.

Legal: The use of MDMA and emerging drugs can lead to fines and criminal convictions.

It is important for young people to see that the short-term consequences of drug use can be far-reaching and not view them as discrete outcomes that always wear off with the effects of the drug. Try to emphasise that the ongoing result of these short-term effects can have a huge impact on a person's relationships, study, work, living arrangements, and future opportunities.

Useful Resources

Below are some links to good sources of information for parents who may be interested in reading further.

For information and statistics on MDMA and other drug use among Australian students:

Australian Government Department of Health (2018). Australian secondary school students' use of tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs in 2017.

https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/secondary-school-students-use-of-tobacco-alcohol-and-other-drugs-in-2017

For information and statistics on MDMA and other drug use in Australia:

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2020). 2019 National Drug Strategy Household Survey report.

https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/illicit-use-of-drugs/national-drug-strategy-household-survey-2019/contents/table-of-contents

For detailed information on the Australian legislation about emerging drugs:

The Crimes Legislation Amendment (Psychoactive Substances and Other Measures) Act 2015:

https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2015A00012

For general information on emerging drugs:

https://positivechoices.org.au/teachers/emerging-drugs-factsheet

For up-to-date monitoring on emerging drugs (new psychoactive substances):

https://www.unodc.org/LSS/Home/NPS

Alcohol Drug Information Service (webchat and helpline):

https://yourroom.health.nsw.gov.au/getting-help/Pages/adis.aspx

For information about the effects and impacts of MDMA and emerging drugs:

Prosser, J. M., & Nelson, L. S. (2012). The Toxicology of Bath Salts: A Review of Synthetic Cathinones. Journal of Medical Toxicology, 8(1), 33-42.

https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3550219/

Karlsen, S. N., Spigset, O., & Slørdal, L. (2008). The dark side of MDMA: neuropsychiatric symptoms after exposure to 3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine. Basic & Clinical Pharmacology & Toxicology, 102(1), 15-24.

https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/j.1742-7843.2007.00159.x?sid=Ovid%3Aovftdb

Favrod-Coune, T., & Broers, B. (2010). The Health Effect of Psychostimulants: A Literature Review. Pharmaceuticals, 3(7), 2333-2361.

https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4036656/

Karila, L., Megarbane, B., Cottencin, O., & Lejoyeux, M. (2015). Synthetic Cathinones: A New Public Health Problem. Current Neuropharmacology, 13(1), 12-20.

https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4462036/