



FACTSHEET 4

ECSTASY AND WORK

A typical situation

Several employees have reported that they are concerned about a co-worker. This co-worker often appears tired, lethargic, depressed and on some occasions is confused over specific work instructions. The strange thing is that this employee's behaviour is irregular in that it appears to be worse on Mondays and Tuesdays and then gradually improves as the week progresses.

Ecstasy: The facts

Ecstasy (also known as E, Eccy, XTC, or Adam) is the street name for methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA) and is usually sold as a tablet or sometimes in capsule form. However, other drugs are often also sold as ecstasy. Ecstasy tablets can contain a range of drugs including amphetamine and amphetamine derivatives, caffeine, aspirin, paracetamol or ketamine. Typically, ecstasy tablets can be identified by a symbol that has been impressed into the surface of the tablet. This symbol can lead to them also being called 'white doves', 'love hearts' or other terms describing the impression on the tablet.

Ecstasy enhances levels of serotonin and dopamine, two important chemicals in the brain. Serotonin plays a role in regulating:

- aggression
- mood
- sexual activity
- sleep
- sensitivity to pain
- memory
- body temperature.

Dopamine plays a role in:

- the control of movement
- cognition
- motivation
- reward.

Users of ecstasy report:

- a sense of well-being and sensuality
- heightened sensory perception
- increased empathy
- increased emotional intimacy.

Ecstasy is almost exclusively taken in social settings, usually as part of youth culture that focuses on dance music. It is one of the most popular drugs associated with 'raves' and 'dance parties'.

While only 7.5% of Australians report having used ecstasy at least once in their lifetime, trend data indicates the prevalence of use is increasing with ecstasy use becoming more popular in mainstream social settings.

How can ecstasy affect work performance?

As ecstasy is a drug that is usually used in social settings, prevalence of ecstasy use and intoxication in the workplace is likely to be low. However, ecstasy 'hangovers' can last for several days after use. Psychological and other effects associated with these hangovers can include:

- confusion
- depression and low mood
- concentration and/or memory problems
- sleep difficulties
- physical fatigue and muscle stiffness
- anxiety
- paranoia.

These effects have obvious implications for productivity, safety and co-worker relationships.

Ecstasy use often occurs with other drug use (e.g., alcohol, amphetamines). Therefore, any effects of coming down from the high or hangover may be the result of multiple drug use. In addition, self medication with other drugs such as cannabis and benzodiazepines during the 'come-down' or hangover stage is not uncommon. The combined effects of an ecstasy hangover, other drug use and lack of sleep due to 'partying' associated with ecstasy use can be major issues for workplace safety and productivity.

General effects

Ecstasy produces immediate positive effects including:

- euphoria
- increased energy
- increased closeness to others.

On occasion, it can also cause negative effects including:

- paranoia
- anxiety
- delusions.

The incidence of serious acute adverse events is low. However, the unpredictable nature of any adverse event and the risk of death and substantial illness/injury associated with these events are what make the short-term negative health consequences of ecstasy use significant.

Short-term effects can include:

- pupil dilation
- jaw clenching and grinding of teeth
- loss of appetite and dry mouth
- tachycardia (abnormal rapid heartbeat)
- hot and cold flushes and sweaty palms
- hyperthermia and associated liver damage/failure
- dehydration and subsequent hyponatraemia (water intoxication).



Longer term effects can include:

- insomnia
- depression
- kidney failure
- poor concentration
- headaches
- muscle soreness.

Ecstasy and the law

It is illegal under Australian Federal and state laws to possess, use, make or sell ecstasy. The penalty for an offence may differ from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, however, fines are usually heavy and a prison sentence is a possibility.

There is no penalty to an employer if ecstasy is used at the worksite, except for normal occupational health and safety requirements regarding workplace safety. However, due to the illegal nature of the drug and for safety reasons, ecstasy use is not acceptable in the workplace.

No sure way to detect ecstasy use

Symptoms associated with ecstasy use are similar to those found with a range of other drugs. The negative consequences associated with ecstasy hangover are also similar to the negative consequences associated with a range of emotional, psychological and environmental problems. As with all suspected drug use, the emphasis should be placed on detecting threats to safety and productivity rather than detecting drug use per se.

Summary

As with other illegal drug, ecstasy use is not acceptable in the workplace as it is an illegal substance. However, for reasons outlined, the prevalence of ecstasy use and ecstasy intoxication in the workplace is likely to be low. Of much more concern to employers and employees are the threats to safety and productivity associated with ecstasy 'hangover'.

Further information or help concerning ecstasy can be obtained from the websites and organisations listed in Booklet 2 of the Information and Resource Package.