

A QUICK GUIDE TO **Drugs & Alcohol**

THIRD EDITION

by the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre (NDARC)

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Health



NEW SOUTH WALES

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LSD

acid, tabs, trips, blotters, microdots

Lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD) is a hallucinogenic drug which when taken produces powerful sensory distortions, intensifies mood and alters thought processes. LSD is usually prepared in liquid form, which is then dropped onto small pieces of blotting paper known as tabs.

LSD was originally synthesised by Swiss scientist, Albert Hofmann, from the ergot parasitic fungus. Four years after this accidental discovery, the Sandoz pharmaceutical company patented LSD and sold it for use in psychotherapy. In the early 1950s, LSD was used by the CIA in a series of experiments testing its efficacy for interrogation and torture. Recreational use of the substance was popularised during the 1950s and 1960s, commonly associated with the anti-establishment culture of this period.

The popularity of LSD decreased during the 1970s to 1980s; however in the 1990s it was largely associated with the club and dance party drug culture, which included substances like MDMA (ecstasy) and ketamine.

LSD and the law

It is illegal to use, possess, supply or manufacture LSD in New South Wales.

How LSD is used

LSD is usually taken orally, either through swallowing or sublingual (under the tongue) administration. In rare cases LSD is inhaled, injected or applied to the skin.

Effects

The effects of LSD are usually experienced 20–60 minutes after administration. Users typically report effects for 6 to 11 hours, but this period can be longer depending on the dose.



Short-term effects

The short-term effects of LSD may include:

- vivid perceptual distortions (hallucinations)
- a distorted sense of time and place
- rapidly changing emotions
- altered state of thinking and depersonalisation
- increased body temperature, heart rate and blood pressure
- insomnia, dizziness and nausea
- paranoia, panic and anxiety.

Long-term effects

The most commonly discussed long-term effect of using LSD is the experience of flashbacks—brief, but intrusive LSD-like experiences that occur after the effects of LSD have worn off. These experiences could be visual distortions, changes in mood or the experience of dissociation.

A rare, long-term risk of LSD use is hallucinogen persisting perception disorder (HPPD), which unlike flashbacks, involves a persistent, distressing and long term experience of hallucinogen-like experiences.

Given its potent effects, prolonged use of LSD can lead to personality disruption, depression and poorer memory.

There is no apparent link between LSD use and the development of schizophrenia or affective disorders, though use could precipitate pre-existing psychiatric illness.

LSD and driving

It is extremely dangerous to drive with the distorted sense perceptions, poor coordination and lack of judgement caused by taking LSD and other hallucinogens.

LSD and pregnancy

There is some evidence linking the use of hallucinogens in pregnancy to an increased risk of miscarriage and birth complications.

If a mother uses hallucinogens while breastfeeding, it is possible that the drug will be present in her milk and have adverse effects on the baby.

Dependence

Tolerance of both the psychological and physical effects of LSD can develop, though it may be lost within several days. LSD is not thought to cause physical dependence (see definition on page 4). Regular users may develop psychological dependence, although this is not common.

Using LSD with other drugs

Cross-tolerance can occur between LSD and other psychedelics—that is, users with a tolerance to LSD may find that they have a tolerance to drugs with similar effects such as mescaline. (See page 6 for a definition of tolerance).

Withdrawal

There are few physical effects when use ceases. Users may experience residual psychological effects such as feelings of anxiety.

Overdose

LSD is not a particularly toxic drug; deaths that have been linked to LSD are usually unintended consequences of perceptual distortion, such as falls. Despite this, taking a larger than intended dose can result in extremely distorted perception, unstable mood, intense fear and an extremely depressed mood.

Treatment

People who use LSD do not generally seek treatment from health professionals and there are few treatment options that can be recommended, apart from those found to be generally effective for drug dependence (see page 4).