

A QUICK GUIDE TO **Drugs & Alcohol**

THIRD EDITION

by the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre (NDARC)

Drug Info is a partnership between the
State Library of New South Wales and NSW Health.

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Health



NEW SOUTH WALES

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A Quick Guide to Drugs & Alcohol, third edition, September 2017

Published by Drug Info, State Library of NSW

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ISBN 0 7313 7239 5 (print)

ISBN 0 7313 7240 9 (online)

Printed in Australia by SEED Print, using Spicers Paper
Monza Recycled Satin 350 gsm and Impress Matt 115 gsm.
Monza Recycled contains 99% recycled fibre and is
FSC® Mix Certified, Impress Matt is FSC® Mix Certified.

P&D-4660-9/2017

NATURAL HALLUCINOGENS

psilocybin mushrooms: *mushrooms, magic mushrooms, shrooms, mushies, caps, boomers*

Salvia divinorum: *salvia, diviner's sage, sage of the seers, maria pastora, magic mint*

mescaline: *buttons, mesc, peyote*

Many hallucinogens occur naturally, including **psilocybin** ('magic mushrooms'), **DMT** (dimethyltryptamine), *Salvia divinorum* and **mescaline** (from the peyote cactus).

Psilocybin or psilocin are hallucinogenic substances found in more than 180 species of mushrooms. They are mainly used for spiritual or recreational purposes and cause similar but distinct hallucinogenic experiences compared with LSD.

It is dangerous to pick and eat wild mushrooms because it is difficult to distinguish edible mushrooms from their poisonous lookalikes. Poisonous mushrooms can cause stomach pains, vomiting and diarrhoea, while some can cause permanent liver damage, respiratory failure, unconsciousness and even death. Symptoms can take up to 40 hours to develop.

DMT is a powerful hallucinogen found in the seeds, bark, leaves or stem of various plants around the world, including some acacia species native to Australia. It is consumed by many individuals as ayahuasca which is mainly used for spiritual purposes. Alternatively, it can be synthesised into a crystalline form which is typically vaporised or smoked.

Salvia divinorum is a species in the mint family which can be chewed, drunk or smoked in order to produce hallucinogenic experiences. Given that salvia is not controlled under the UN conventions, it is classified as a new psychoactive substance (see Chapter 15, New & emerging psychoactive substances).

Mescaline is most commonly known as the active ingredient of the peyote cactus and is used both spiritually and recreationally. The effects of mescaline include visual hallucinations and altered states of consciousness, but can also include vomiting, headaches and fear/anxiety.



Natural hallucinogens and the law

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

How natural hallucinogens are used

Naturally occurring hallucinogens are used in a variety of ways, depending on their form. They are often smoked (with the exception of mushrooms) and can be boiled into tea preparations.

Mushrooms can be dried or boiled, then added to other foods.

Effects

The short- and long-term effects vary greatly depending on the hallucinogen used. Additionally, the effects of each drug can differ substantially from person to person.

Short-term effects

The short-term effects of naturally-occurring hallucinogens include (but are not limited to):

- vivid perceptual distortions (hallucinations)
- a distorted sense of time and place
- altered sense of consciousness
- loss of coordination
- increased body temperature and sweating, and/or chills

- nausea and vomiting
- anxiety.

The effects produced by these substances, and the user's reaction to these effects, vary greatly between individuals.

Long-term effects

Given that these substances both distort reality and alter consciousness, one of the many long-term risks associated with using naturally occurring hallucinogens is a change in personality and/or patterns of thinking.

Other rarer effects include flashbacks (brief but intrusive hallucinogen-like experiences that occur after the effects of the hallucinogen have worn off), hallucinogen persisting perception disorder (HPPD), impaired memory, prolonged depression and anxiety.

Hallucinogens and driving

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

Hallucinogens and pregnancy

Most of the research looking at hallucinogens and pregnancy have focused on LSD and have provided some evidence that LSD use during pregnancy leads to an increased risk of miscarriage and birth complications. It is very likely that other naturally occurring compounds may have the same effect.

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

Interaction with other drugs

Cross-tolerance can occur between psychedelics. This means that users with a tolerance to, for example, LSD, may have a tolerance to drugs with similar effects such as mescaline (see page 6 for a definition of tolerance).

Dependence

Naturally occurring hallucinogens are not thought to cause physical dependence (see definition on page 4). Regular users may develop psychological dependence, although this is not common.

SALVIA DIVINORUM**AYAHUASCA**

Withdrawal

Given that there is little risk of physical dependence, there are minimal physical effects when use ceases. Users may experience residual psychological effects such as low feelings of anxiety.

Overdose

Naturally occurring hallucinogens are not particularly toxic drugs; deaths that have been linked to hallucinogens 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 and can also prolong the experience for much longer than expected.

One of the dangers of using magic mushrooms is that of accidentally ingesting a highly toxic non-hallucinogenic variety. Some other naturally occurring hallucinogens, such as datura, may cause poisoning in high doses.

Treatment

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